

THE INTENTION OF HIS SOUL

PUT FORTH BY THE MOON

MORE ESSAYS FOR THE UNTHEOLOGICALLY MINDED

BY THE REV. HUBERT L. SIMPSON

Author of "The Intention of His Soul," etc.

Second Edition. 7s. 6d. net

HODDER AND STOUGHTON LTD.

PUBLISHERS LONDON, E.C. 4

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BY

HUBERT L. SIMPSON
M.A. (EDIN.)

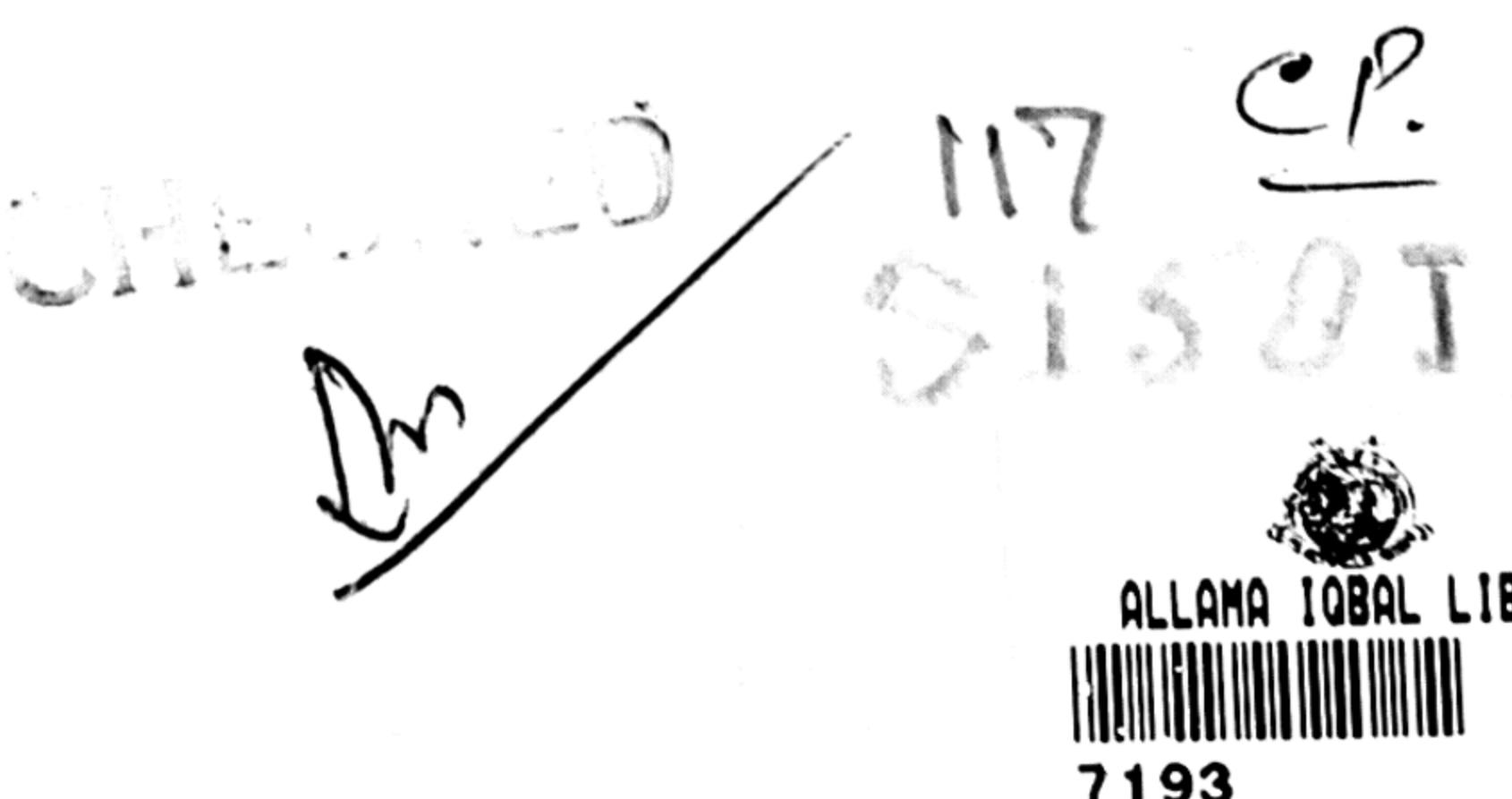
NINTH EDITION

HODDER AND STOUGHTON
LIMITED

LONDON

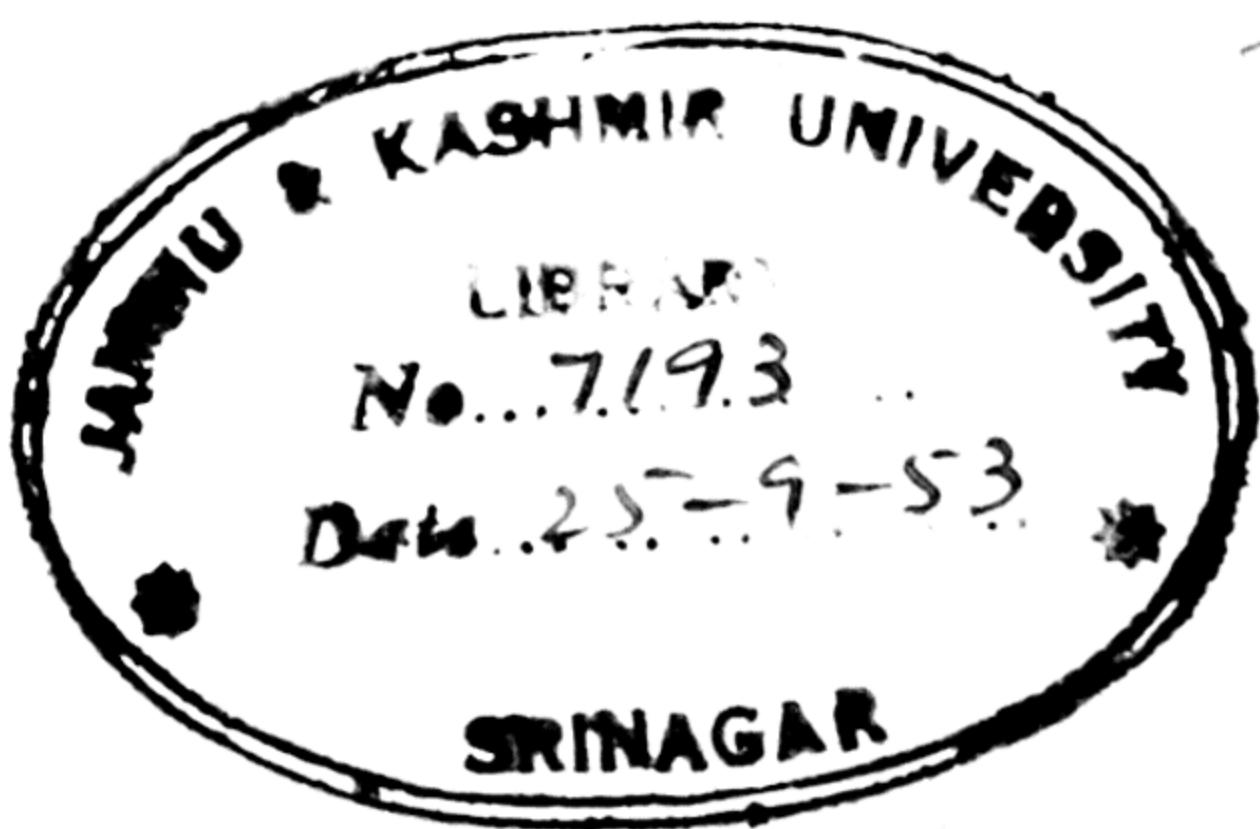
Acc. No : 7193

First Edition printed . . . October 1920
Second " " . . . December 1920
Third " " . . . April 1921
Fourth " " . . . September 1921
Fifth " " . . . January 1922
Sixth " " . . . July 1922
Seventh " " . . . March 1923
Eighth " " . . . December 1923
and this the Ninth Edition December 1924



“WHEN God shakes a kingdom with strong and healthful commotions to a general reforming, 'tis not untrue that many sectaries and false teachers are then busiest in seducing ; but yet more true it is, that God then raises to His own work men of rare abilities, and more than common industry, not only to look back and revise what hath been taught heretofore, but to gain further and go on some new enlightened steps in the discovery of truth. For such is the order of God's enlightening His Church, to dispense and deal out by degrees His beam, so as our earthly eyes may best sustain it.”

MILTON, *Areopagitica*.



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INTRODUCTION

“MAN and the intention of his soul,” said Leonardo da Vinci, “are a good painter’s paramount objects.” The “proper study” has never at any time been neglected among us, but it is significant that the second part of his dictum should be receiving such widespread illustration to-day. It is a popular fallacy that people do not relish preaching, and are not particularly interested in the cure of the soul. There never were more preachers abroad in the world, and never have they reached wider or more representative audiences. You cannot escape their message by the simple device of staying away from church, for most of them do not speak from Christian pulpit or religious platform. People buy their novels at Ruskinian prices ; they flock to their plays in thousands. You cannot get away from them, do what you will. They lie in wait for you in your daily newspaper and monthly magazine. They catch your eye on the street hoardings, and will not let you alone even if you go to a picture-house. If you will not take it from black Geneva gown or white surplice, you will get it in rough corduroy and dungarees. Milton’s “ghost of a linen decency” in these matters has been effectively laid.

The preaching, we must admit, is not always comprehensible, or even articulate. It has often been most eloquent as a “song without words” in khaki and boracic lint. Sometimes, as the apostle Paul had experience, “some indeed preach Christ even of envy and strife, not sincerely. . . . What then? only that in every way, whether in pretence or in truth, Christ is proclaimed; and therein I rejoice, yea, and will rejoice.” There was the most marvellous and daring insight in that remark from a man who might have been expected to display the jealousy and narrowness of a convert. He saw that Christ was so great that He could not only survive, but actually profit by, both the misguided zeal of friend and the detraction of foe.

The present-day attitude to religious things reveals in a most hopeful and suggestive way the intention of the soul, and provides a fruitful field of study, as well as an occasion of deep searching of heart, to those whose “paramount object” the affairs of the soul of man are commonly supposed to be. One reads with profound admiration and respect the treatises that come from the pens of our Christian scholars and experts. And yet it is left to writers like Oscar Wilde, Pierre Loti, Mr. Clutton-Brock, Mr. Richard King, Mr. A. C. Benson, men of whom many hold by few articles of our Christian creeds, to write the books that the million read, just because these men write as if they had fairly fallen in love with the Man of Nazareth, and met Him

in the Strand yesterday. We have Mr. H. G. Wells coming back again and again to topics of the soul, if not through any apprehension of the mercy of God in Christ, yet from shrewd appreciation of the fact that these topics are the most popular that even a popular novelist can handle to-day. There are the great statesmen and rulers, the most famous sailors and soldiers of the world, confessing their faith, each "in his own language" it is true, but never without both signification and significance. There has never been such a full and friendly riding of the marches of religion. If these roughriders would not recognise themselves under the style of "defenders of the Faith," we may certainly hail them as "wardens of the marches" of the spirit. And it is in their writings and pronouncements that we find the truest expression of the spiritual reactions to the acid tests which the soul of man is undergoing in these days.

"We are not in the midst of a religious revival in America to-day," writes Mr. W. G. Shepherd in a recent number of *Harper's Monthly*; "but we have plunged over our heads into a sea of religious and spiritual curiosity. Never before in the history of our country has there been such a general turning of the masses to the things of the soul as we see about us to-day." This was the condition of things which our Lord hailed as peculiarly hopeful. It was the man who "put his mind to it," rather than the man who gave the pious and orthodox reply to His questions, who received the

assurance that he was not far from the heart of things. There are many in these days who simply need to be introduced to themselves. Drifting in the fog, they have been carried nearer land than they had ever deemed possible. Like their prototype in the Gospel story, all that they require is to be given their bearings in the spiritual geography.

It is no uncommon thing for shipwreck to occur at the place where two seas meet—the inescapable tidal flow of the spirit, and the racing current of modern thought. While some are ceaselessly complaining that the great galleon of orthodoxy has stuck fast and remains unmovable, and others are lamenting that the violence of the waves is breaking up the ark in which much safe voyaging has been done, the time seems ripe for a little spiritual beach-combing, and recovery of much valuable treasure. That the spirit of adventure and discovery still makes its unquenchable appeal is shown by the popularity of the various cults which claim to have established communion with the Unseen. But they are gazing at crystals who should be gazing at Christ. They forsake the Table of Remembrance and of the love that knows no shadow of turning, for tables which they allege do turn.

The following chapters contain some of the finds of this spiritual beach-combing, and they are offered to those who, repelled by what they imagine to be the orthodox presentation of religion, nevertheless desire some expression of the faith by which they live,

if only to help them in clearing their own minds. There dies hard in every one of us the small boy's inclination to show his independence by shooting out his tongue and hollering "Yah!" at persons and things that are supposed to have earned his respect and reverence. "I will go down now, and see whether they have done altogether according to the cry of it; and if not, I will know." It is the great word of the Father who knows that boys will be boys. And each is judged by the intention of his soul, not by the wild whirling words wrung from him by a bout of pain or a season of darkness. It has been said of Chaucer that "he has a tolerance, a tenderness for human nature, which may almost be called faith. He cannot explain, he cannot make inconsistency reasonable: but he gives to the reader, perhaps without knowing it himself, the secret that men and women are what they are, and not by any means always what they do." He who does not impart this conviction has little right to try and interpret the mind of Christ to his day and generation, for it was ever the secret of His success. The whole point of His story about the Boy who came Home is that the wounds of the soul do tend to heal, as the surgeons say, "by first intention."

That we are coming to see ever more clearly the need for recognizing the intention of the soul is evidenced by the fact that the most radical suggestion made by the Regius Professor of Divinity at Oxford in his Bampton Lectures for the current year is that

“in the present divided and imperfect state of the Church all those who celebrate the sacraments according to the command of our Lord and with the full intention of fulfilling His will, and who appoint their ministers as His Apostles did, with prayer and the laying on of hands, must be held to have valid sacraments and orders.” *The intention* to fulfil the mind of Christ is admitted by Dr. Headlam to be all that is required to the worthy and effective performance of the highest functions of the Church. This emphasis on *intention* is, as Mr. Shillito has pointed out, a real contribution to the problem.

These are days in which many things are being shaken. We are all apt to establish ourselves in some religious or social Zion, and then to imagine that we can live at ease. And it is a shock when we begin to realise that our Jerusalem (whatever it may be) is not so compactly built together as we had fondly believed. The outstanding military revelation of the War to this generation was probably the complete demonstration that the day of the fortress as a stronghold and defence is past. The Allied leaders soon realised that there was neither wisdom nor safety in holding fortresses that were liable to be destroyed by the fire of the enemy. The Christian army must make the same discovery and employ the same tactics. No longer must she seek shelter within dogmatic forts, many of which have, one after another, to be evacuated under the reducing fire that is brought to bear upon them.

She must not seek safety in sullen retreat from one untenable outpost to another—from the position of an infallible Church to that of an infallible Pope, or from that again to an infallible Book. For us the theological infallibilities are gone, and we are glad to see them go. The one organ of infallibility that Christ promised His followers was the living Spirit of truth. Safety is only to be found in going out into the open, in being led from one position to another by the Spirit of truth, in pressing forward where openings offer. Victory for each of us will be achieved, not by sheltering behind any theological masonry of other days, but by entrenching in some position that we ourselves have won, and that for to-day at least we are prepared to defend, and to defend with our last ounce of strength: to-morrow, please God, we will have gained new and further heights, driving the foe before us. “There would then appear in pulpits,” as Milton said, using an expression which is commonly mistaken to be a Presbyterian Scotticism, “other visages, other gestures, and stuff otherwise wrought, than we now sit under, oft-times to as great a trial of our patience as any other that they preach to us.”

I

ABIGAIL VOICES

RECENTLY, in the beautiful old church by the northern sea where, John Knox declares, “began God first to call me to the dignitie of a preachour,” there was read in the hearing of the worshippers the twenty-fifth chapter of the First Book of Samuel. As we read the old tale together again, as old tales should be read, in the quiet of the evening when the lights are low, I am sure we all realised anew that these old chroniclers could tell a story amazingly well. The colours are as fresh as the day when the picture was painted. The figure of the churlish boor, the hot passion of David’s red-haired temper, the swift, sure tact of a wise and gracious woman, the high lights of war, the peaceful background of pasture-land and grazing flocks—how vivid it all is!

The wonderful agelessness of the story became manifest as we read it for the hundredth time, and read it under conditions similar to those under which it first was told, in unsettled peace following upon a time of warfare. David and his men have just come through the fierce fires of war. Their needs are obvious, and they naturally turn for relief in the first place to the wealthy man whose possessions have been secured to him through the devotion and sufferings

of those who now apply to him for sympathetic consideration of their circumstances. The application of the soldier for relief is both straight and courteous. "Thus shall ye say to him that liveth in prosperity," David instructed his emissaries, "Peace be both unto thee, and peace be to thine house, and peace be unto all that thou hast." David does not grudge Nabal the enormous prosperity that has come to him through the fortune of war conditions. But he gently reminds him of the fact that peace has been won for him and security for all that he possesses, not without blood and tears and sufferings on the part of others. "I have heard that thou hast shearers," is his firm but courteous way of letting Nabal know that the returned soldier is perfectly well aware that Nabal has made large wool profits out of the distress of others. He reminds him of the auspicious circumstances of his modest request for fair and favourable treatment: "We come in a good day." And he delicately hints that Nabal will not be unwilling to acknowledge and to discharge his moral obligations and what are nothing less than debts of honour. The wealthy flockmaster, "whose business was in Carmel," replies in the callous, conscienceless, vulgar fashion that we have come to associate with too many war profiteers. The word brotherhood has no meaning for this bloated farmer who has battened on the blood and patriotism of other men. The crass selfishness of the contemptible creature comes out in every word he utters. He seems to be goaded to uncontrollable fury by the very suggestion that he has debts of honour and claims of chivalry to consider. "Shall I then take *my* bread, and *my* water, and *my* flesh that I have killed for *my*

shearers, and give it unto men of whom I know not whence they be ? ” What a way to speak of the men who had stood between him and the loss of everything, between him and the loss of his miserable life ! And you see David’s men turning upon their heels and striding off with thoughts in their hearts too bitter for speech. And when they come to David with their report, you just see him clench his teeth and an ugly look come into his eye. A short, sharp, military order breaks the tense silence, and swords that had been sheathed gleam out from their scabbards once again.

It is at this point that the woman Abigail comes upon the scene in the story. Some of Nabal’s workers, utterly ashamed of their master’s conduct, and guessing at the trouble his scandalous behaviour will bring upon them all, lose no time in telling Nabal’s wife of the situation. Was there ever such an ill-matched pair as Nabal and Abigail ? With apprehension she listens to the account of the latest evidence of the criminal brutality of the man to whom she is wife. With sympathetic ear she listens to the story of the chivalrous conduct of the men whom Nabal would reward in such shameful manner. In words that have been chosen for more than one memorial to those who gave their lives, or that were inscribed on rolls of honour, in our own country’s time of need—and surely there are not to be found in the whole of Scripture words more beautiful or sentiment more true and applicable to the facts—they tell the praise of David’s warriors. “ The men were very good unto us, and we were not hurt, neither missed we anything, as long as we were conversant with them, when we were in the fields : they were a wall unto us both by night

and by day, all the while we were with them.” And then their indignation gets the better of them, even although they are speaking of their master to his wife ; and out of a vivid sense of their danger and their utter contempt of the man who has brought them into that position, they drop into plain and forcible colloquialism as they express their opinion of Nabal : “ for he is such a son of Belial ”—or, in modern parlance, “ He is such a thrawn devil, that one cannot speak to him.”

Abigail, taking in the perilous situation at a glance, loses no time in going out on her mission of conciliation, to undo if possible the mischief her fool of a husband has done. Down the mountain path swings David, nursing his wrath and muttering as he strides along : “ Surely in vain have I kept all that this fellow hath in the wilderness, so that nothing was missed of all that pertained unto him : and he hath returned me evil for good.” To think that a fellow-shepherd and a brother-farmer could have treated him so ! And so with his hot, hurt heart blazing within him, and devising schemes of awful and swift vengeance, he is urging his men on, when suddenly he confronts the sweet womanliness of Abigail. She offers a heartfelt apology and immediate and tangible proof of her regret to David, summing up the odious character of her wretched “ man ” in a humorous pun. His mother had named him well. “ Nabal is his name, and nabal his nature—Fool by name, and fool in fact. Lay not to heart, good sir, his churlish conduct. I wasn’t in the house when your men called, or this would never have happened.” And at once the warrior soothed her apprehensive mind.

He too knew what it was to be married to a shrew. Poor Abigail could not have had a worse time of it with Nabal than he had had with Michal, Saul's saucy daughter. And one touch of nature, and more than a touch of grace, avails to relieve the difficult and dangerous situation. David's anger melts from his heart under the sweet influence of Abigail, as the snow melts from Hermon beneath the warmth of the summer sun.

Gradually it dawned upon David how big a thing Abigail had done through her courage, and her womanly restraint, and her exquisite tact. She had not only saved the lives of those who would most assuredly have paid the penalty for their master's boorish insult. She had restored his own soul, and saved him from bloodguiltiness. And humour and tact and womanly grace, and mother-wit on the one side, and chivalry, pride, and honest manhood on the other, mingle in a common atmosphere of profound spiritual emotion. "And David said to Abigail, Blessed be the Lord, the God of Israel, which sent thee this day to meet me: and blessed be thy tact, and blessed be thou." Have you ever thanked God for His great gifts of humour and of tact—two of His busiest guardian angels, directing the hot hearts of men? David did. "Blessed be thy advice," is a tame rendering. We are not inclined to bless advice, whatever quarter it come from. The Revised Version renders, "Blessed be thy wisdom." But that also falls short of the exquisite thing that Abigail did. "Blessed be thy tact, and blessed be thou, which hast kept me this day from bloodguiltiness, and from avenging myself with mine own hand. For in very

deed, as the Lord, the God of Israel, liveth, which hath withholden me from hurting thee, except thou hadst hasted and come to meet me, surely there had not been left unto Nabal by the morning light so much as one man child.” It had been a near thing; but in the mercy of God the situation had been saved through this woman’s tact and the successful appeal to David’s generous instincts. “ Except the Lord God had withholden me,” “ except thou hadst hasted and come to meet me,”—how many a man, looking back over the dark and difficult passages of life, chants the song of his soul’s salvation in that double chord.

Yes, there are Abigail voices that we all hear at life’s critical moments, keeping us back from the shameful thing, or urging us on to the doing of the shining deed. Often they come from unexpected quarters, as this warning came to David, and arrest us in midway of our passionate purpose through their very unexpectedness. They are like those bells of Ys which the Breton fishermen hear sounding up from the deep sea-buried city. They only ring when the storm is loud and a mighty agitation sways and stirs our being to its utmost depths. And then, sometimes, right through the passionate pulse of our emotion, welling up through the strong-running tides of feeling, those bells give tongue. When, with maddened brain and outraged heart, we are all for making some Nabal pay dearly for his folly, we are stopped in mid-career by some soft Abigail note, soothing our ruffled spirit and whispering a better way. And the thunder and the earthquake and the fire give way before the might of that still small voice that is so strangely compelling.

“ Oh happy wind, how sweet
Thy life must be !
The great proud fields of gold
Run after thee.”

So gentle yet so compelling, so unexpected yet so inevitable, once we have heard it call. “ Can any good thing come out of Nazareth ? ” And there comes the one good thing the world has ever known. “ He shall not strive nor cry, nor lift up his voice in the street.” Yet all the ears of the world are strained to catch the music of that voice. It has stayed the world’s mad mood and summoned the ages to wiser ways. “ His that gentle voice we hear, soft as the breath of even.” Yes, indeed ; but with what wonderful variety of accents it can fall, until David is at a loss to know which is the right way of it,— “ The Lord, the God of Israel, which sent thee this day to meet me,” or “ except thou hadst hasted and come to meet me.” And he says both in the same breath, for both are right. Abigail, O Abigail, meeting our mood’s mad moment ! Abigail voices,—homely Doric or cultured tones ; the preacher’s appeal or the singer’s message ; the aptly remembered challenge of some poet’s high-souled lines or the hoarse whisper of a pal under the lamplight, tugging a warning sleeve, “ Don’t be a damned fool ! ” Abigail, O Abigail, with the white hair of a long-since loved face, or the fresh tint of love’s young dream ! Abigail voice, heard and heeded just in time, “ Blessed be the Lord, and blessed be thy dear tact, and blessed be thou.”

It was for David, said the preacher that Sabbath evening, the voice of calm reason, the voice of religion, and the voice of memory.

“ Let not my lord, I pray thee, regard this man of Belial, even Nabal : for as his name is, so is he ; Fool is his name, and folly is with him.” Abigail reasons quietly with the angry warrior. She bids him see things steadily, and see them whole. The world is full of Nabals ; why allow them to exasperate us ? Abigail reminds David that, armed as he is with a good cause and a clear conscience, he is more than a match for all the Nabals that ever spat forth their spiteful spleen at better men than themselves. “ For the Lord will certainly make my lord a sure house, because my lord fighteth the battles of the Lord ; and evil shall not be found in thee all thy days.” Why let a contemptible creature like Nabal tempt you to sully a record like that, or even to tinge your bright sword with his worthless blood ?

Are there not times when we need the steadyng word of Abigail’s reasoned appeal ? Our hearts grow hot with just indignation as we contemplate the kind of creatures that wield wealth and power, and consider the unscrupulous means by which many of them acquired it. When we remember the men who were “ very good to us, a wall unto us both by night and day ” ; remember how many of them sleep in almost forgotten graves, while those who stayed at home, sheltered by their sacrifice, are altogether given over to conscienceless profiteering upon the sufferings of their widows and orphans, devoid alike of public spirit and of inward spirituality ; pleasure-loving, sin-hunting, naked women, and leering, loafing, brainless partners of their petty lusts—my God ! who would not gird on a decent clean sword and swing out

after David to make an end once and for all of the whole contemptible crew ?

Abigail, O Abigail ! When our hearts are maddened afresh with the age-long problem that tormented the mind and vexed the soul of Asaph, lead us to the only place where he found reason and comfort,—in the long, long thoughts and better mood of the House of God. O voice of quiet reason, thou Abigail sent of God to meet us in our mad hour's mid-career of vengeful thought, show us the better way ! Teach us, like David, to tarry the Lord's leisure and wait patiently for Him. Let us be proudly and devoutly sure that they who were good unto us, fighting the battles of the Lord, not only did a far, far better thing than Nabal fattening among his flocks, but that they know it to-day and rejoice in the part they chose.

And once again, Abigail's was the voice of religion, as well as the voice of reason ; and that was how she stirred the soul of the fighting Psalmist so deeply. She not only brought calm reason to bear upon the difficult situation ; she fortified the soul of David, and increased his patience, by the very definite reminder that he was in the hand of God. "And though man be risen up to pursue thee, and to seek thy soul, yet the soul of my lord shall be bound in the bundle of life with the Lord thy God." At a time of strain you need to offer a harassed sufferer something more than the maxims of calm reason if you would really restore his soul. He wants to have the assurance, not only that he is walking in paths of righteousness, but that while he does so he will have the comfort of the very rod and staff of God. I don't know exactly what Abigail meant by that expressive phrase about being " bound in the

bundle of life with God" ; but I like to connect it with the climber scaling the sharp and slippery peaks of life, moving up step by step after his guide, in the inward assurance and comfort of the knowledge that the one rope binds them both together.

" It fortifies my soul to know
That, though I perish, Truth is so ;
I steadier step when I recall
That, if I slip, Thou dost not fall."

The voice of reason is the assurance that what man has climbed before, man can climb again. The voice of religion adds, " And the same trustworthy Guide is waiting for you too, sir."

" Bound in the bundle of life with the Lord thy God." And then, did she recall David's great exploit, with the account of which the whole land was still ringing, when she added that terrible statement about the souls of his enemies being slung out by God, as from the hollow of a sling ? Just as the shepherd-lad used to pick out smooth stones from the brook and hurl them far down the mountain-side from his well-slung sling, so would God hurl useless souls out into the echoless void.

And in the third place, the voice of Abigail was the voice of memory ; and we all know how strong and haunting a voice that can be. " When the Lord shall have dealt well with my lord, then remember thine handmaid." David never forgot her from that moment on. The story ends in sheer and wonderful romance, as all stories do that have God for their Author. And long after, when David had at length won his kingdom and his crown, and all his enemies were vanquished, he

would recall the tones of that voice that had kept him from staining his hands with crime. He domesticated his guardian angel as other wise men have done. The Abigail voice became the perpetual music of his home, stifling for ever all baser sounds, as once long ago it had quenched his passion and his wrath when he was marching on Carmel.

The mills of God ground quickly in the case of the drunken sot Nabal, and David had not long to wait to see the wisdom of Abigail. "It came to pass about ten days after, that the Lord smote Nabal, that he died." "Be patient therefore, brethren, until the coming of the Lord," says St. James to his sorely-tried fellow-Christians, catching the Abigail whisper after raging in ineffectual invective against the Nabals of his day. Nabal was only fattening for the apoplectic seizure which carried him off. But the man's heart had died first, the historian tells us, "and he became as a stone." The petrifying effect of unsanctified prosperity soon works its way.

As for David, he saw and understood, and fell upon his knees. "Blessed be the Lord, that hath pleaded the cause of my reproach from the hand of Nabal, and hath kept back his servant from evil: and the evil-doing of Nabal, hath the Lord returned upon his own head." And that night his men heard him tuning his harp, and singing a new song to the silent stars. "Fret not thyself because of evil-doers, neither be thou envious against the workers of iniquity. For they shall soon be cut down like the grass, and wither as the green herb. Trust in the Lord, and do good; dwell in the land and follow after faithfulness. Rest in the Lord, and wait patiently for him:

fret not thyself because of him who prospereth in his way, because of the man who bringeth wicked devices to pass. For evil-doers shall be cut off: but those that wait upon the Lord, they shall inherit the land. And God bless Abigail for teaching me that lesson."

This is the day of unconventional preaching and unaccustomed leadership; and no feature of our time is more significant than the part assigned to woman in "the science of power." Abigail has got both voice and vote now. Will her womanly tact once again avail to save a desperate situation, and her courage and foresight become again the theme of the historian's admiration?

II

THE CITY WITHOUT A WALL

WE are hearing and reading much these days about the task of reconstruction which faces all the nations of the world. The invaded and devastated lands will have much building to do with stone and brick and lime. But not less hard and strenuous is the social and spiritual rebuilding of waste places to which we all are called ; a work that will need all that we possess of faith and courage, of insight and patience.

Such was precisely the state in which his country found itself in the days of the prophet Zechariah. In the descriptive language of that writer, the great military powers which had threatened the peace and well-being of the world had had their horns cut. "We have walked to and fro through the earth," said the heavenly patrol, "and, behold, all the earth sitteth still, and is at rest." And almost in a flash the soldier is succeeded by the surveyor. The dust of battle has scarcely settled, when Zechariah finds the hands that had been wielding the sword now busy with theodolite and chain, taking measurements for the laying out of the streets and walls, and ascertaining what could be made of the ruins. It was the daily witnessing of this spirit of eagerness and determination that gave the prophet the form of the message which was his peculiar

contribution to the future of the commonwealth. Clearly the humbling of the great world powers was not sufficient in itself to restore prosperity and peace to the nations. They must set about securing the positive blessing of the Lord God. They must make their calculations and lay their plans accordingly, building with no narrow and unimaginative view of things. They must realise that they are not only the heirs of a storied past, but also the stewards of God's great future for posterity. And above all, they must ever bear in mind that unless the Lord build the city they labour in vain that build it.

Now I suppose that there is no greater danger confronting us to-day than that of the hasty adoption of immature and unconsidered plans for national reconstruction. Everybody seems to have some kind of a programme ; the strident creaking of propaganda machinery is heard throughout all the land ; and each one fondly imagines that his is the master-plan. The first thing to be done, says Zechariah, is to restrain all rash and hot-headed attempts at building. The plan of the Divine commonwealth is probably a great deal wider and bigger than even the most sanguine dreamer has conceived. We must protect ourselves and posterity from the "young man in a hurry," whatever his age and pretensions may be. The words of the prophet may be rendered thus : "I lifted up mine eyes, and saw, and behold a man with a measuring line in his hand. Then said I, Whither goest thou ? And he said unto me, To measure Jerusalem, to see what is the breadth thereof and what is the length thereof. And, behold, the interpreting angel was standing by, as if in doubt regarding the significance

of this action, and the angel of the Lord went forth to meet him, and said, Run, speak to this young man, who so well represents the efforts of the youthful community, and tell him, not indeed to desist from his undertaking, but to realise the higher meaning suggested by the work of restoration."

We are all determined, please God, to "build Jerusalem in England's green and pleasant land." And the function of the prophet and of the Church to-day, as in the days of Zechariah, is to ensure that there shall be no hurried jerry-building with untempered mortar upon foundations of sand. The young man in a hurry thinks he knows all about it. "Run, speak to this young man," is still the word from heaven. His enthusiasm, the enthusiasm of the nation which he embodies, must not be damped, but it stands in need of direction. Youth and inexperience think that they know everything, and just what the dimensions of the city of God must be. Men still go out with their material standards to tabulate and schedule facts and forces that can be as little imprisoned and charted as the winds of God and His far-darting lightnings. They think to ration the bread of life and to control the fires of the spirit. They take their little measuring line, and when you ask them what on earth they think they are going to try and do, they answer quite unabashed and confidently, "To measure Jerusalem, to see what is the breadth thereof, and what is the length thereof." They think they can valuate the moral capacity of a people and size up her soul.

Now, says this prophet of God, that's just what you can't do. Some people speak as if the way to heaven lay through the ballot-box, and the constitution of

the new Jerusalem could be framed in a Parliamentary committee-room. You can't measure the soul of a people or determine the bounds of their spiritual habitation. "Wider still and wider shall thy bounds be set : God, who made thee mighty, make thee mightier yet." Whatever you do, said Zechariah to the men who were planning the future of Jerusalem, leave room for expansion. He always goes farthest who knows not how far he means to go. Now that the walls are broken down and the ancient landmarks obliterated, believe in God's future. Do not hamper moral and spiritual and intellectual growth by laying down "false limits of your own," and hard-and-fast lines of demarcation. Jerusalem is going to be a far bigger thing than any of you conceive. What is needed most of all just now is a sanctified imagination that will see the greatness of the nation's calling, and will be chary about doing anything in the way of erecting confining walls in Church or State.

Was this wise counsel on the part of the prophet ? There is an ineradicable desire on the part of all men to choose and see their way. We all want to plan out life and map off the boundaries. Even when we see the need for change and progress we want to advance according to plan. Like these Jews of old, we are conscious of our weakness in the midst of unseen and perhaps unknown enemies, and we are anxious to put up the best and strongest we can in the way of defences. But the walls of Jerusalem, so far from proving her strength, were a veritable snare to her. They were able neither to keep her growing and expanding population in, nor to keep her enemies out. "The walls of Jerusalem were ultimately her destruc-

tion ; encouraging, as they did, the Jews to make so obstinate a stand against the Romans that an almost unparalleled slaughter and misery was the result."

Once again, to an unparalleled extent, ancient walls have been broken down throughout the nation and all over the world. People are naturally ready to fear the worst. "Run," says God to His messengers, "and tell them to hope the best. Jerusalem shall be both safe and great." It is not such a bad thing as it seems, that the old walls have been levelled. Disaster will ensue only if they are rebuilt on the old narrow and cramping principles. When the Great Fire raged in London, men thought at first only of the terrible destruction and the utter loss and misery it had caused. It was only by degrees that people came to see, not only that it had wiped out for ever foul and plague-haunted hovels, but had actually prepared the way for the building of a greater and a nobler metropolis.

We are all inveterate Balbuses, bent on building walls. We set up our habits, and shut outmuch of the light of heaven with our high ramparts of convention, and shelter behind our ancient prejudices, and then fondly hope or imagine that we have safeguarded ourselves against all rude intervention from without. And then by and by we hear an ominous scraping and tapping, which grows into a hammering, and presently another of what we had imagined the fortifications of society comes crashing about our ears. It is a disconcerting experience. What will go next ? we wonder. Blessed are they whose faith and hope is not killed in the fall, like those eighteen upon whom the tower of Siloam fell in the days of our

Lord. Don't be alarmed, is Zechariah's message to those who live in days of falling walls. Have faith in God. No real defence of liberty or truth or righteousness or national well-being will suffer. God dwelleth not in temples made with hands. He and His cause need the protection of no walls that we may raise with hot and feverish hands. What looks to-day so like destruction may be seen to-morrow to mean expansion. "Let not your heart be troubled," said Jesus to His disciples, in an hour when the very foundations of the universe seemed threatened. "Trust God and trust Me. In my Father's house are many mansions; if it were not so I would have told you." And if they could trust Him to prepare a place for them in the unseen world, could they doubt either His willingness or His ability to prepare and protect the place of their earthly habitation? Do not let us by our fear or favour in these days do anything in a spirit of godless panic which would hinder the Divine plans for expansion in our own life, or in the life of the nation and the world.

And what was a menace to the well-being and extension of Jerusalem the civic state in the day when the walls were down, was no less a danger to Jerusalem as the matrix of religion and the guardian of the sacred fire of revelation. To St. Paul one of the great excellences of Jesus Christ his Lord was that He had "broken down the wall of partition." He was always breaking through walls and letting sunlight and fresh air into things. "Ye have heard that it was said by them of old time, Thou shalt not . . .: but I say unto you . . ." It looked like breaking down old

walls, and yet we know that He was really making far stronger and surer the defences of religion and morals.

In the things of the spirit, as in the customs of society, men have always been tempted to imagine that a wall was the best means of defence, when all the time it was too often a source of weakness. High walls of "Thou shalt not" neither kept the inhabitants of the City of Peace within restraints, nor did they succeed in shutting the tempter out. Too often indeed, the very presence of the wall invited the assault of the enemy. The man who is content merely to try and ward off evil is never safe. Safety lies only in taking the field against the enemy. There exist in Europe to-day traces of what is sometimes considered one of the great achievements of perhaps the proudest and most warlike empire the world has ever known. It is the great Roman Wall across Western Europe and in this country. It was in reality the great tombstone upon the grave of Rome's dead power. Formerly her protection had been in every camp and in the arms of her soldiers. She could go anywhere and do anything. She knew it, and her enemies knew it. But there came a day when she lost her nerve, and her will to pursue the enemy to his lair, and her interest in pressing back the forces of the multifarious foes that hung upon the fringes of her life. And in that day of fear and failing faith she built that great wall. For a while it served its purpose. But the building of it was a sign of decay at the heart of the Roman Empire. Not for long could even her well-built masonry resist the pressure of barbaric forces from without. At last the wall was breached. To-day its ruin is the monument of a colossal failure. That is the state of the man who is merely

trying to be good, and has lost his passion for righteousness. It can't be done ; it isn't safe. We may think we have the defence of strong social customs, of the pressure of public opinion in a Christian country, of a godly parentage and upbringing, all combining to protect us from surrender to the shameful thing. But if we have lost our first enthusiasm in the Church of Christ, and flung away our sword, and are engaged in no kind of active combat with the powers of evil, in the name of God, let us beware.

Once again, we know how frantically the defenders of the faith have built up ramparts and citadels of creed and dogma. How much have these availed to defend the faith ? Have they not again and again proved a positive weakness to the Church of Christ, and prevented her from marching out to fresh forms of enterprise and new calls of duty ? Have they not too often at once lulled those within the fortress into a false sense of security, and invited the successful attack of the enemies of religion ? To-day the walls of custom and convention and creed and dogma are down in the Church as they have not been for ages and ages before. So far from being an evidence of the Church's weakness, it is a sign of her strength and a pledge of her power, and affords her the grandest opportunity of expansion and conquest that has ever presented itself to her since the days when twelve valiant saints marched out to conquer the world, clad only in the mail of their Leader's word. When the Church sought to enlarge her shield she shortened her sword. When she raised her walls she lowered her witness. We have too long been occupied in building futile walls—walls that have neither

kept the saint in nor the sinner out. We have done the very thing against which the prophet saw the angel run to warn the young man of his vision. We have made the love of God too narrow by false limits of our own. We have baulked His plan for the expansion of Jerusalem. All that our granite guards have done has been to shut people out of the Church of God. Now that the walls of our Jerusalem have been laid low, as so many other unauthorised enclosures have been, by the devastating sweep of war, let us beware how we propose to rebuild them.

But, you will ask, is the Church of Christ to have no defence? Yes, says Zechariah, "I, saith the Lord, will be unto her a wall of fire round about." That is still our only defence. The striking picture is that of the watch-fires built round a desert caravan when camping at night, to scare away wild beasts. That was the kind of protection God was going to be to His people, a sure safeguard of all the vital interests of a moving, marching company. The mighty bastions of well-built Babylon were breached by Darius; the walls of Jerusalem, built in defiance of this warning of Zechariah, were destined to be demolished before the imperious might of Rome; but the bulwarks of the spiritual Zion could neither be sapped nor scaled, for Jehovah, the Lord of hosts, was as a wall of fire round about His people. He is the one rampart of the redeemed.

There is only one safe move for the Church of Christ as for the individual, and that is a *forward movement*. She has her strength and her security in the missionary and moving spirit of her members. Battle, not battlements, is her sure shield. She is unwalled but not unwatched. So long as her enemies see the glow of her

camp-fires, they will know that she is on the move and that God is with her. She

" needs no bulwarks,
No towers along the steep,
Her march is o'er the mountain waves,
Her home is on the deep."

Experts differ as to the precise moment at which the doom of Germany as a military power was writ. But it is certain that it was at either one or other of two crises : either when her armies ceased to go forward, or when, a little later, they settled down to trench warfare. That much-vaunted Hindenburg Line was her undoing, and the lesson is for the Church of Christ. The moment you begin to draw the line, you have determined the limit. The moment when she begins to think, as many of her false advisers sometimes seek to counsel her, that her safety lies in a Nicæa line or a Westminster trench, her doom is sealed. You can't protect the lines of spiritual communication by those artificial and dead and stagnant means. The only safety is that forward-creeping barrage of protecting fire of the living and moving God evidenced in redeemed and believing lives. Principal Rainy once said : " As things change around us, immobility may become at once the most insidious and the most pernicious form of inconsistency." " The fierce heat of the war has made fluid many things formerly metallic. Let us hope that the forms of Church organization and doctrine are among them, that they may be run into more serviceable moulds." For the most part we are nearly always right in what we affirm, wrong in what we deny. No subscription of strict creeds, no adhesion to traditional

practices, no careful discipline in doctrine and worship are sufficient in themselves to protect the Church, much less to advance the Kingdom of Christ ; but a right spirit, the spirit of God, will. We may well call this man a prophet, who saw that the city of God was *a city without a wall.*

And for our comfort and encouragement let us lay alongside the vision of Zechariah that of a later seer. For John also saw the Holy City in vision, as she would be when all her warfare was accomplished and she was finally built to the plan of God. And then it was possible to rejoice in the completed work, and to go about her walls and mark well her bulwarks, and to measure it, for there was no danger of error in the finished plan. And it's all right, St. John tells us. It's all going to work out right. For " he that talked with me had a golden reed to measure the city, and the gates thereof, and the wall thereof. And the city lieth four-square. And the twelve gates were twelve pearls. And the gates of it shall not be shut at all by day : for there shall be no night there." It's all right, said John. It's all going to come right in the end.

III

THE TRANSPORT WAGON

THE great secret of successful journeying is to travel light. Half the discomforts and worry and uneasiness that arise are due to the care of the baggage that we take along with us. The longer and more arduous the journey undertaken, the more rigorously do we need to scrutinise the list of the things with which we propose to encumber ourselves. Will the utility and service of each be worth its weight and care and room? Do we really need this, and this, and that?

Reflections like these arise in our minds when we read that "Moses took the bones of Joseph with him" when he inaugurated one of the greatest mass movements in the history of humanity. A box of dry bones on a wilderness march—were they worth the cost of transport? Would they be of any use to that strange company wending their way through the banked waters, over the burning desert sands, and along the rocky defiles, on to the Promised Land? Why did Moses take the bones of Joseph with him? There was, of course, the strict injunction of the dead that his body should be carried up when his own folk went home again: and to the end of time men's thoughts will turn back, as their eyes grow dim, to the hills that they loved in childhood, and they will long to be laid among their

own. But sentiment has often to give place to sterner considerations. And apart altogether from the encumbering of the Israelitish army with useless baggage, would it not have been well that the Hebrew who had risen to the position of a prince and ruler in Egypt should sleep in one of their magnificent mausoleums, a perpetual memorial of the greatness of the son of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob ?

The really great things of life are always the simplest ; the sublimest acts have seemed at the time the most commonplace and obvious. Unless we have eyes to see, it is the easiest thing in the world to miss the significance of the thoughts and words and deeds that have inspired the generations of men. To one this faded flower is nothing but a withered bloom : to another it is a token with almost sacramental potency, for it recalls an hour of new vision and holier aspirations. To one visitor peering into the glass case of the museum, this yard of stained and faded cloth is simply an old banner : to another it is the begetter of noble and cleansing memories, because he or his ancestor went through the fight when that flag was kept flying in the face of fearful odds. A cross on a lonely hill-top—to one it is but the symbol of a beautiful idealism : to another it is the power of God through faith unto salvation.

You cannot, perhaps, explain or defend Moses's action with regard to the bones of Joseph, to the man who criticises it. The action either has infinite value, or it has none. And yet there are certain questions being asked of the pilgrim Church these days by not unfriendly critics, which merit the courtesy of something more than an evasive reply. The campaigner

on active service discovered the jealous guardianship of the transport wagon. The eye of criticism seemed to have moved from the polishing of accoutrements to that of kit inspection. The limited accommodation of the transport wagon entailed the sacrifice of much that might have seemed essential to the comfort, if not the actual success, of the campaign. And there has been a similar shifting of the emphasis of criticism with regard to the spiritual campaign. It is not the appearance of the things she carries, but their actual necessity, that the Church is called upon to defend to-day. The transport wagon must not be burdened with pious rubbish. It is not an arbitrary tyranny, but an effective generalship, which insists on this uncompromising kit inspection. Each article of the faith is being examined afresh with respect to the requirements of the road

It is a commonplace to say that we live in an age when men are travelling faster than they have ever travelled before. We do not refer merely to the speed of our various means of locomotion ; even more amazing is the rate at which we travel in the realm of thought and customs. If our grandfathers would not find themselves at home in a 60 horse-power motor-car or a Handley-Page aeroplane, they would be still more out of it in a society where aims and ideals and ways of looking at things have undergone even more startling transformations. Our mental belongings are all being challenged at the custom-houses of thought as we cross the frontiers of new kingdoms of knowledge and discovery. What are we doing with that parcel of dry bones ? Why are we carrying on that old custom ? What is the good

of that ancient tradition? And we begin to look more carefully ourselves into the things that we have brought along with us thus far on the journey of life, and to wonder how many of them we can continue to carry with us, and for how long. There are some of the things that are very dear to us—the faith of a mother, the words of a father, the thoughts of some revered teacher who first opened our young minds to the grace and the glory of God's universe. Will they be admitted into this new land of thought into which we are entering? Can we defend their existence? Can we prove their utility?

Well, in the first place, he has got much to learn who thinks that a thing has ceased to be useful because it is dead. In recent years the magnificent pine-trees in Kensington Park—the “black-crowned red-boled giants” of Matthew Arnold’s poem—have been dying. Experts say that there can be little doubt that this is due to the misdirected tidiness of the gardeners who swept up the old dead pine-needles and left the roots without natural comfort and protection. There is a fussy smartness which is always handing out new brooms made from the latest bristling facts of scientific discovery or philosophic thought, and bidding us hastily sweep away old forms and customs, never realising in its profound ignorance how much the tree of everyday life owes to the comfort and protection of these same old forms and customs. Even if prayer and family devotions and attendance at public worship were dead and empty shells from which life and assurance had gone, a very good case could still be made out for the retaining of these old exercises for the sake of the well-being of society.

Some years ago, in the course of an interview, Marquis Okuma, who has been three times Prime Minister of Japan, and who, after the Mikado, is probably the greatest figure in the eyes of his fellow-countrymen, said that since the Anglo-Japanese Alliance he had been studying the history and literature of Great Britain, and, he remarked, "although I am not myself a Christian, I realise that you owe all that is greatest and best in your national life and literature to Jesus Christ."

We have reached the gravest crisis that our nation has ever faced. Is this a time to be indifferent to what those who have watched our national progress from without, with one voice, in East and West alike, confess to have been the secret of our greatness? Is this a time to be indifferent about the place given to Him in whom are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge? We will go the length of imagining that the whole thing is a beautiful myth, of imagining the sheerly impossible; that the manger of Bethlehem was never filled; that no Cross was ever erected on the green hill; that it was only a pathetic delusion that the Arimathean's garden tomb was empty that Easter morning. And we will deliberately say this: Teach our children that myth. Whatever else you omit, make them familiar with that myth which made the defenders of Scotland's freedom kneel in prayer on the eve of Bannockburn; which made Cromwell say of his Ironsides, "I raised such men as had the fear of God before their eyes, and thereafter knew no defeat"; which sent Nelson into his cabin on the *Victory* to make the well-known prayer before going into action at Trafalgar; which moved the most typical of

Scotland's sons to ask that they should read to him out of the Book, while he sat by the open window in Abbotsford, listening to the murmur of his beloved Tweed, until his feet should stand in the waters of a deeper and a darker river. Teach our children, for God's and humanity's sake, that blessed myth that founded village school and Nonconformist chapel in Wales and England, where that something was formed in the character of Britain's Prime Minister and America's President, which is the hope of a bruised and bewildered world to-day. Banish what you will from our schools, but leave us the myth that gave birth to the Red Cross Society, and the Y.M.C.A., and the Bible Society, and the Salvation Army.

Or are we to conceive of a walk to Emmaus, where One drew nigh in the guise of a pedlar, and beginning at the *Arabian Nights* and *Hans Andersen*, expounded to His broken-hearted companions the way of salvation? Are we to believe that the face of the world would have been changed in just the same way if St. Peter at Pentecost had told the crowds the story of Jack and the Beanstalk or of Cinderella? Would the Ethiopian Chancellor of the Exchequer have gone on his way rejoicing, with quite the same abandon, if St. Philip had told him the excellent little moral tale of the Babes in the Wood? No, if there is any sanity left among us we will insist that if our children know about Ali Baba and the Forty Thieves, they shall at least not be unacquainted with the Nazarene and the Two Thieves; if they are told of Beauty and the Beast, they shall be introduced, and that right early, to the only Prince who can transform the beast in every one of us.

There was once a Scottish soldier who carried with him the dead heart of another very gallant Scot. Was it a futile and unprofitable thing to do ? When Douglas took the precious casket and flung the heart of the Bruce into the thick of the fight, crying, " Forward ! gallant heart, as thou wert wont ! " he did nothing that contributed immediately to settle the issue of the day ; but it enabled him to add, " Douglas will follow thee, or die." The bones of Joseph were, from one point of view, not a help, but a hindrance, to Moses and the Israelites in their long march and in their encounters with their enemies by the way ; but their presence in the camp was always a reminder of the glory and the greatness of the days gone by, and of the romance of that life that had entrusted itself wholly to the guidance of God.

A great part of the wisdom of life consists in learning that there are many things that we cannot *afford* to leave behind, even although their utility may not be capable of an immediate and convincing proof to the cynical bystander who watches the pilgrim procession pass. James Anthony Froude has described a port in the south of England where Walter Raleigh and his half-brothers played at sailors in the reaches of the Long Stream ; " in the summer evenings doubtless rowing down with the tide to the port, and wondering at the quaint figure-heads and carved prows of the ships which thronged it ; or climbing on board, and listening, with hearts beating, to the mariners' tales of the new earth beyond the sunset." The quaint figure-heads were not a vital part of the ship ; they could have been dispensed with without loss to the vessels themselves. But somehow, grotesque and

inexplicable though they seemed, they wove themselves into the imaginations and dreams of those boys ; and the great thing for England was that the lads listened to the tales, and had their longings stirred by the vision of those far lands.

There are many things about the vessel of God's truth that we cannot understand. I suppose that most of us were puzzled in childhood by some of the quaint and even grotesque figure-heads of a theology which we could not quite make out. There were terms and expressions, many of them learned through Shorter Catechism or Prayer Book, which left us more mystified than enlightened. But did they not all seem to us to be part of a stately galleon in which one might sail to new conquests and discoveries ? It mattered not that there was much that baffled our understanding ; the great thing was that somehow, through the leading of God, we had climbed on board, had listened with burning hearts to the mariners, and caught a glimpse already in imagination of " the new earth beyond the sunset."

But I think that the presence of the bones of Joseph in that marching column had more than a negative significance. Moses may at the first have taken with him his pathetic burden out of a sense of piety and respectful honour to the wishes of the dead. But I can well believe that he came to find their presence a real inspiration. To that primitive people, whose sense of immortality can, at the best, have been but dim, did it not mean much that they had yesterday's Dead with them in the march of to-day ? Did it not contribute to their spirit of hopefulness and perseverance that they had in their midst so personal a

memorial of the great head of their race who, when he might have slept in peace and solemn grandeur among the princes of the house of Pharaoh, elected rather that his old bones should go out with his wandering kinsmen in their long search ? Did it mean nothing that Joseph had decreed that all that remained of his mortal body should not rest in an alien splendour, but go rocking in the caravan through the trackless desert, taking its chances with the fortunes of his afflicted people ? To an Egyptian potentate the honours and the pomp of death were only less magnificent than the glories of life. Their mortal remains were embalmed and preserved with the highest skill, so that it is possible for us to-day to look upon the very features of the Pharaoh of the Oppression who drove these same Israelites and their leaders Moses and Aaron out to seek for peace and freedom. They were laid to rest with every token of human greatness, and lying in their vast and magnificent pyramids they seemed to have achieved a kind of immortality here on earth, as their dead bodies bid defiance to the powers of corruption and decay. All this had Joseph refused for himself, taking rather the risk that his bones should bleach under the desert sun than that they should know any other rest save that which God should give His people in the day of visitation.

They were no dry bones that Moses took with him, but the symbols of a living faith. Often when baffled by his own fears and the faithlessness of the people under his care, must Moses, who also had refused the honours of a prince of Egypt that he might share the fortunes of the people of God, have knelt in prayer by those remains, and been inspired and strengthened

by the memory of the man who believed that God would one day surely visit His people. And to the discerning members of that strange army it must have been a comfort to know that the remains of that great and good man of God were in their midst. It was as good as a guarantee that God would yet bring them safely to the end of their wanderings, "For surely the bones of Joseph must rest at last," they would say to themselves, "and then we shall too."

That is how the pilgrim Church has always been encouraged and sustained in her onward march. That is, I think, how faith has come to most of us, and been kept alive and strong. We have begun by performing what seemed to us, perhaps, but an act of piety, a discharge of honourable duty to the memory of the sainted ones who have gone before. We have taken the relics of an ancient faith with us when we set out upon the journey of life. We have given filial heed to the counsels of the wise and the good. And lo ! the burden that we shouldered has proved to be, not a heap of dry bones, but a living power, a perpetual source of inspiration and uplift. In carrying it gladly, gladly have we discovered that it was supporting us. The march took on a new meaning, the goal seemed less dim and distant, as we woke to the sublime realisation that Yesterday's mighty Dead were with us in the enterprise of To-day, that they would seek no rest until we and they had together found it in the land of God's promise, in the hour of His accomplished will.

August Strindberg, the Swedish poet and dramatist, who died at Stockholm a few years ago, throughout the greater part of his life was the pride and inspiration of antichristian radicalism on the Continent ; but he

came back eventually to the old moorings. His very last work in which he reviews his chequered sixty years' pilgrimage has been aptly described as "the canticle of his life, a hymn of thankfulness for the recovered faith in which he has found peace." With passionate insistence he reiterates the need for finding a place in our caravan for the ancient faith if the land of promise is ever to become the land of possession. "My reason cannot think logically till I have opened connection with the Logos, and no longer discharge contrary currents of sterile denial and doubt. Only in life with God is there freedom of thought, freedom from impure impulses, selfish and ambitious interests. That is the *freed* thinker in contrast to the 'free-thinker,' who has left the rails and lost connection with the overhead wire."

In the fellowship of the Church of Christ we find the corrective for our partial and often distorted view of things. Here we are lifted above our own changing moods and wavering feelings. Here we are cheered and animated by the glow of the common faith of others, our comrades on the march, "who, either through the same reasoning, or from different reasoning, or else simply on the basis of their own religious experience, have reached the same conclusions as ourselves ; and it strengthens our own belief in those conclusions to meet others who have reached them." Bunyan, with his quick insight, tells us that his favourite character, Mr. Fearing, loved much to see ancient things and to be pondering them in his heart.

During the war there broke out in the town of Salonica a disastrous fire which burned for days and destroyed a great part of the town. To our troops

there it proved the occasion for winning the devotion and attachment of the people whose lives and property they did so much to save and rescue. Of that fire one of our officers present related a curious and remarkable coincidence. The most interesting church in Salonica was that of St. Demetrius, which, unfortunately, suffered considerably in the conflagration. But the scorching heat also destroyed the plaster covering of the west wall, and exposed a seventh-century painted representation of the figure of St. Demetrius fighting a ravaging fire in Salonica in his day. That is one of the things which the flames through which we have all been passing have done for us; breaking through the surface crust and revealing to us the souls of the saints and heroes of old who fought the fires of their day. And this in itself is a great gain and a mighty inspiration.

Long ago, in the Book of Ecclesiasticus, the prayer was put on record: "And of the Twelve Prophets may the bones flourish again from their place, for they comforted Jacob and redeemed them by the assurance of hope." Truly the ancient bones flourish again when they are borne in the arms of faith and love, and the old-time miracle is repeated as, touched by the breath of the eternal Spirit, they stand up upon their feet, an exceeding great army.

IV

THE LURE OF THE WILDERNESS

BALAAM's ass saved his life in the days of his flesh, but she has been like to be the end of him ever since. Not even Jonah's whale has done a greater disservice to the prophet than this ass has done to the man who rode her so hard, and beat her so cruelly, that day in the path of the vineyards. But she has been amply avenged, for she brayed so loudly that most people have never heard anything else. Balaam spoke some of the most beautiful words that have ever fallen from human lips. But how many could repeat them ? All a heedless world knows about him is that he had an ass. The whale has indeed swallowed Jonah : the ass has a larger audience than the preacher whom she carried.

And yet Balaam is a character whose spiritual history not only has many points of similarity to our own, but is, take it all, truer to the common run of experience than that of almost any other figure in Holy Scripture. This man with his hot temper and his rich vein of poetry ; this man who went out to curse the organised religious forces of his day, and who, in spite of himself, was moved to see the beauty of the thing they stood for ; this man with his tragic end closing down upon those purposes of good which were ever forming in

his heart but never came to full fruition,—he is one whom we know well.

It is of this man that we are told at one point in his experience that “he went not, as at other times, to seek for enchantments, but he set his face toward the wilderness.” Whatever else this generation is doing, it is protesting loudly against all attempts to put a millstone of materialism about its neck. The witch of En-dor is being kept busy these days; and whatever else we may say about the phenomenon we can say this at least, that it is not altogether a bad sign. It’s a good deal more interesting, and a good deal more artistic than to wallow in the trough of materialism. You cannot for ever keep the spirit of man under, and the natural reaction from materialism and atheism is a good going dose of superstition and necromancy. One rather welcomes the sign of the time when our newspapers and periodicals are full of spiritualism, were it only as a picturesque change from films and football and betting. On placard and hoarding one has read the cheery announcement: “Perhaps you will not die,” and “The dead can communicate with us.” I am heartily glad that people think that these tremendous truths should not only be preached from our pulpits but that they are thrilling enough and popular enough to bill. It means, for one thing, that the spirit of man is coming into its own again in our time, and that is all to the good.

Whenever the public has discovered a good thing its proprietors and producers have to issue the warning to “Beware of imitations!” The imitations may be, and often are, very dangerous. But they are also evidence, striking and gratuitous evidence, that the

original product is something of the very first importance and the very highest good. While we may well beware of mere imitations of the gospel of the immortality of the spirit of man as given to the world by Jesus Christ, let us welcome the very striking fact that the original is great enough and vital enough to have brought forth specious substitutes.

Mr. Joseph Lucas tells of a man "who was digging a hole in his garden to bury a dead dog and unburied a Greek statue of Venus." That is the kind of experience that Balaam had. He was proceeding to inter Israel, so to speak, at the urgent request of Balak, just as many another man, either for himself or at the suggestion of some one else, has tried to bury all-religious appeals out of sight, when he dug up something of rare and exquisite and homage-compelling beauty. The Spirit of God moves in such mysterious ways that we never can tell when He will lay His arresting hand on the soul of a man and compel him to listen, as the Ancient Mariner held the Wedding-Guest, and made him deaf to the ringing of other bells, until he had heard all the story of salvation.

Balaam evidently felt the lure of the mysterious and the occult, just as many feel it to-day; and he practised them, until one day he suddenly changed his tactics. "He went not, as at other times, to seek for enchantments, but he set his face toward the wilderness." As he looked down on those rows of weather-beaten tents, arranged with military regularity and precision as Moses the great general of the Israelitish host had instructed them: "as gardens by the riverside, as lign-aloes which the Lord hath planted"; as he looked upon those men with the dust of the

wilderness clinging to the folds of their garments ; as he thought of the long march they had made, carrying the symbols of a great idea through the trackless desert ; as he realised how these men had freed their souls from slavery as well as their bodies from the house of bondage, something of the wonder and the truth and the infinite possibility of it all smote upon his soul, and leaving all the muttering and the mumming, the mystifying and stupefying incense of his seven altars, he headed for that desert and its great silent spaces and pure austere winds. " He went not, as at other times, to seek for enchantments, but he set his face toward the wilderness."

Now I think that some such crisis as that comes to many of us in the course of our lives. It is a thoroughly sound instinct which moves the Christian Church to observe in varying degrees the season of Lent, with its call to greater strictness of life and bridling of the appetites. Maeterlinck, in one of his essays, shows how there is a kind of instinct driving us at times to seek for reality in the only place where we shall probably find it—on the sharp peaks of pain. All those legends about the nightingale pressing its breast against a thorn in order to be able to pour its deathless music forth into the night ; of the pelican feeding its young with drops of blood from its own breast, bear evidence to the fact that mankind has always had an instinctive feeling that the world of sentient things could never come to its highest expression apart from some revelation of sorrow or suffering.

" The mark of rank in nature
Is capacity for pain ;
And the anguish of the singer
Makes the sweetness of the strain."

They were purblind fools who said, "Come down from the cross and we will believe in you." We couldn't have believed in Him unless He had endured the cross. If "bloodless surgery" and "painless dentistry" have always something suggestive of quackery about them, so also, deep down in the convictions of the race, there is a similar distrust of those religions which are very pretty and painless and thoroughly suitable for a west-end drawing-room. But Calvary wasn't a pretty sight. Those bloody crosses would have given a terrible shock to "nice" people. And when you have discussed "auras" and "higher thought" and "demonstrating" and the "triumph of mind over matter," Mary, the Mother of God, just looks at you with great eyes of wonderment, as she staggers beneath the Burden she and the beloved disciple and the loyal Arimathean are laying in the garden-grave. And somehow, the heart of humanity has always given its casting vote for Mary and her Son's gospel of pain and love, love revealed through suffering, and suffering glorified through love.

"Love is an agony," said Origen of Alexandria ; meaning love is a brave and endless warfare between some cherished ideal of the soul and the plain reading of events and facts. "Faith is a fight," said St. Paul ; meaning that it must be for ever up against appearances, whether it be dealing with the human or with the divine. The only true love is that disposition which was in the poet's heart when he asks : "How can man love but what he yearns to help ?" Of love, of faith, of the knowledge of God, it is ever true that really to come to the experience of these a

man must not seek for enchantments, but set his face toward the wilderness. "Every man who knows himself to be a spiritual being has to declare his independence, and fight for it."

Balaam built seven altars in his desire to get near God, and in his anxiety to please King Balak. But it availed nought: and he only found his soul when he left them behind him and set his face toward the wilderness. And it is typical of the kind of experience that so many have had. In order to please others, and partly out of a vague desire to get into personal contact with God, they have done the orthodox thing. They have raised altars in the most approved style. They have frequented the ordinary services of the Church. But somehow nothing seems to have come of it. These religious exercises have just seemed to them as so many "enchantments," unreal and unsatisfying. And then they have been driven forth into the wilderness, fighting wild beasts, tempted of the devil—the bare wilderness of war, or disappointment, or defeat; and in the sheer austerity of the experience they have found the God they missed in the Church.

Man's way is to build stone altars; God's way is the wilderness, with its revelations of burning bushes and kindled imaginations. Man's method of fighting social and moral evil is to go for it direct. God's way, Christ's way, is to hide a little leaven or bury a tiny seed—and wait. When you stop building your trim little altars, and get out into the great unmeasured spaces of God's temple not made with hands, you will begin to understand. An hour of self-denial will teach you more than a whole library of theology.

“He that doeth the will shall know of the teaching.” Just as there comes one day to a woman the chance to lay all the soft enchantments of love-stories by and make for herself the great experiment, and learn in one blissful surrender all that love really means, so not until one is prepared to leave all theories about religion and take the great leap into the arms of God, can he hope to understand. God Himself rises in His seat to watch a man leaving the dilettante search for the latest and most pleasing enchantments, and taking the wind of the desert in his face. Such an one has hit the trail at last.

And in the broad spaces of the desert, amid God’s high mountains and His illimitable plains, and His glorifying sunrises, all our petty notions of right and wrong go by the board, all our estimates of service seem inadequate and unworthy. You may, like Balaam, build seven altars and offer a bullock and a ram on every altar, and be no nearer God. But when you have gone out into wider views of God’s mercy and worthier conceptions of His grace, then the Spirit of God will come upon you also, and you will be able to take up your parable and sing.

I think it is Anatole France who tells of an acrobat who had fallen on evil days, being received into a monastery. When he saw how all there were serving God, tending His sick with wise and patient skill, copying His Word and making it beautiful, while he could do nothing, he was sad at heart. One night he was missed, and the Abbot was scandalised to find him in the chapel. He had laid before the high altar the strip of carpet that he used to take to fairs, and, lying

on his back, he was giving his performance with every ounce of skill he possessed or had acquired, keeping his metal balls spinning and moving with full stretched powers. The Abbot stepped forward to rebuke him for such sacrilege, when, so the story goes, the figure of the Virgin moved from her pedestal and flung her blue robe over the acrobat in token that his offering of skill and love was accepted by Him who holds in His hands the spinning worlds. "All service ranks the same with God"—"according to that a man hath, and not according to that he hath not." It's better to be a good juggler than a poor preacher.

And this principle tests and sifts our actions as no code of morals could do. It is always a jejune and anæmic religion that begins to ask whether a Christian may do this or should refrain from that. Some Pharisees will always be offended at the sight of others exercising their Christian liberty. Every pleasure is freely yours if you can be truly and honestly thankful for it to the Heavenly Father. Cease building those little pedantic altars for your service of the God who made the spacious firmament. Get out with Balaam into the wilderness, and you will find both a wider and a healthier conception of what is pleasing in His sight. If you can say a grace for any of your avocations or recreations, it is a pretty safe test of their worthiness.

But the tragedy of Balaam consisted in just this, that though he went so far, he stopped short of the highest. Israel needed a poet such as he, yet he is less famous than his ass. And from poor Balaam we must turn to that other Rider upon an ass who also

set His blessed face toward the wilderness ; who for the joy which was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and hath given us not only an example for our guidance, but salvation for the asking.

V

VOID OR VOICE?

THE last few years have been filled with events and incidents the mere recital of which has stirred the soul and quickened the pulse. But there have been few which can have appealed more powerfully to the imagination than the account of what happened on the night of the 23rd of April 1920. On that night the planet Mars was nearer to the earth than it will be for several years, and all night long two devoted scientists were on the alert for the wireless messages that would prove the presence of intelligent beings in Mars and their desire to communicate with the sons of earth. "Lengthening their sound waves they sent their ears past the radius of the world's noises, past a violent electrical storm in the upper strata of our atmosphere, out into limitless space, that dead cold vacuum in which throughout eternity our world has been spinning. But all was silence. No answering sound wave flashed out of infinity, and Mars pursues its path in wordless disdain." The imagination plays with the possibilities of that April night, soaring through tracts unknown, discovering with wonder and apprehension and awe the mark of a footprint amid the star-dust of the heavenly ways; catching down the long corridors of untraversed space

the echo of a sentient voice breaking the silence that has brooded over the universe since the dawn of creation. "That one night might have revolutionised all our world. It might have opened tracks of progress and discovery which would have made all past achievement seem tame and commonplace. . . . Anything might have happened and nothing did happen. That is the sheer cold fact of it."

If I were an artist I should want to try and put upon canvas that picture of these listening men. For it is the ear of humanity that is astrain through the throbbing silence of that night to catch the voice that never spoke. Oh for one word, one little spoken word ! How much it might have meant ! That night when others were dancing and chambering and slumbering the ear of man might have heard the word for which the ages have been waiting. The gossip of the stars, the small-talk of the spheres ! How even one faint whisper of it would have struck silence through the senate-houses of earth ! And if *the* word had been spoken, what endless possibilities the thought of it conjures up ! Yes, it was the ear of humanity that was open that night as it has never listened before at scientific instrument or beneath love's lattice.

And even more significant is the thought that the ear of humanity was listening that night *in hope*. Men have done mad things ; but they were not judged insane who held their ears open through the slow creeping hours of darkness for the voice from the back of beyond. They were men of balanced mind and sober, calculating ways who took up the receiver for the ring from universe central. This in itself is a

triumph, a thought to make us walk our earth of men with head erect and an infinite expectation in our hearts. If there was disappointment as the outcome of 23rd April 1920 there was something more than that. "But at least we are left with a marvellous picture of two patient men listening, listening, listening to that ageless silence in which the world was born, listening in sure certainty that one day that silence will be not a gulf but a bridge over which we will carry at the last the triumphant standards of humanity." That unquenchable hope, that sure and certain expectation that we have a right to traffic with the stars, and one day will have the power, is one of the most remarkable as it is the most precious and inalienable gifts of the race. It suggests that amazing exhibition of humanity's quenchless faith which broke through the lips of John the Baptist : "Art thou he that should come ? or look we for another ?" Justice has seldom been done to that astounding calmness of faith which, even when it seemed quenched, burst into one of the beacons of our ultimate salvation. Even supposing the last and greatest hope were dashed, even supposing Jesus of Nazareth should prove another heartbreak, still would those patient eyes of humanity turn again to the infinite horizon for the Coming One. If not Christ then Another. It must be so. Otherwise it could not be. One would come to bridge the gulf, God's long-delayed word to His waiting and watching children ; and over that established bridge the procession of unconquered humanity would stream, bearing its torn and soiled yet triumphant banners, on to the gates of eternity its rightful home, on to the very heart of God.

It was with thoughts like these that I laid down my morning newspaper. "Lengthening their sound waves they sent their ears out . . . into limitless space. But all was silence. No answering sound was flashed out of infinity." But I could not leave it at that. And laying down my newspaper I turned again to the Fisherman's letter, that letter which begins : "Simon Peter, a servant and apostle of Jesus Christ, to them that have obtained a like precious faith with us in the righteousness of our God and Saviour Jesus Christ : Grace to you and peace be multiplied in the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord." Ah, Simon, thought I, your gracious greeting was never more welcome, never more like a letter from home ; and your word of peace is sorely needed because they have had no message from Mars after all. It was the right tonic after that disappointing cable from the trans-Atlantic observatory. If Marconi had no fresh news for us, did it matter so very much in view of what Simon had to say ? Here was conviction and deliberation and a most heartening confidence. Here was one who had sent his ears out into limitless space, and all was not silence. And he was reporting on his discovery in the most restrained and scientific language. His statement had all the convincingness of a Royal Commission's report combined with the warmth and friendliness and appeal of a letter from the folks at home. He too had sat up through the long hours of a never-to-be-forgotten April night till the cocks were crowing through the slumbering city, and that night the world's long silence was broken, and God spoke the word. And, as he mused on it, other memories came flocking back, until there was nothing

for it but to get out inkhorn and parchment and write another letter. "And I think it right," he says, "so long as I am in this tent, to stir you up by putting you in remembrance. . . . For we did not follow cunningly devised fables, when we made known unto you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were eye-witnesses of His majesty. For he received from God the Father honour and glory, when there came such a voice to him from the excellent glory, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased: and this voice we ourselves heard come out of heaven, we who were beside him on the sacred hill."

What made the hill sacred? Simply the experiences that sanctified it. There was no sanctuary on its summit: no holy legend made it the frequented shrine of far-travelled pilgrims. Up to its quiet height went Jesus with three closest friends that He might get as far away from earth and as near to heaven as might be. And there three listeners with ears astrain heard the silence of eternity broken by the Voice from behind the veil: "This is my Son, the Beloved, in whom I delight." That is the message heaven breaks its silence to reveal. "This voice we ourselves heard come out of heaven." There is the fact. And how impressive the restraint of the reporter's comment! "Whereunto ye do well that ye take heed, as unto a lamp shining in a dark place, until the day dawn, and the day-star arise in your hearts." Not yet the wished-for dawn, but night and confusion and much groping. Yet while it lasts, by the light of the Fisherman's lamp humanity has steered its onward way. "We have the word of prophecy made more sure,"—the straining timbers of the old vessel spliced as it were by the deft

hands of an old salt. Enough light to make us pick our way carefully, and yet not too much to long for more, not so much as to tempt us to grow careless in our sailing.

They will hear no more though they listen with all the apparatus of this late century's marvellous ingenuity. For there is no more to say. God cannot do anything greater than He has done. Christ is His Word, His last word. And listening mankind has confessed, It is enough. This is the Gospel, this the good news. And every soul that has heard and embraced it confesses with St. Peter that he thinks it right, so long as he is in this tent, to tell others the great story, and to keep on reminding them of it. "We are left with a marvellous picture of two patient men listening, listening, listening to that ageless silence in which the world was born. . . . Lengthening their sound waves they sent their ears past the radius of the world's noises, out into limitless space. But all was silence. No answering sound wave flashed out of eternity." Is that all we are left with? Then pray that Mars may cross our track to-night and let the silence of eternity echo with the crash of a hideous collision that will make the farthest planets reel in their orbits. Ring down the curtain upon an indecent farce. If God has been playing Himself so long and so cruelly, let Him amuse Himself with the spectacle of a world going up in flame.

Is it likely? Is it credible? Did you ever know an artist deliberately put his foot through his masterpiece? "If ye being evil—" No, we are not left with a picture of two patient men listening to ageless silence. We are left with a picture of three men on an

observatory peak, which their experience led them afterwards to call "the holy mount"; we are left with the witness of one of them, the last of the three observers to go behind the veil, witnessing to the Word. "The Word was with God, the Word was Divine. . . . In him life lay, and this life was the Light for men." We are left with another of the three testifying with his latest breath: "This voice we ourselves heard come out of heaven; . . . whereunto ye do well that ye take heed."

That is the situation to-day. The surroundings are dark and perplexing enough, God knows. Yet there is the ineradicable conviction which is part of the inheritance and possession of the race that the day will dawn, as St. Peter puts it, and the day-star (so often looked for by the all-night fishermen) arise in our hearts. Meanwhile the Fisherman's lamp is the only light of hope and safety. Take heed to it; tend it carefully. The Life of lives which is the Light for men—through Him alone can grace and peace be multiplied in these graceless and unpeaceful times, "according as his divine power hath granted unto us all things that pertain unto life and godliness, through the knowledge of Him that called us by His own glory and virtue; whereby He hath granted unto us His precious and exceeding great promises; that through these ye may become partakers of the divine nature, having escaped from the corruption that is in the world by lust."

"We did not follow cunningly devised fables, when we made known unto you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were eye-witnesses of his majesty." I believe that; and I always smile to myself when I read St. Peter's naïve disclaimer of invention.

Why, matter-of-fact, stolid old Peter could not have told a fairy tale to save himself ! When he thought his life depended upon it he couldn't do it. That attempt in the courtyard of the high priest to make out that he had never known Jesus was such a thin and obviously laboured story that a serving-maid read the confusion in Peter's face as he tried to pass off his fable. "Cunningly devised" indeed ! Any fable Peter could tell would be the poorest, lamest affair that ever was told to the Horse Marines.

No, here we have truth and a challenge. Now is the time for all good men to come to the open service and fellowship of the Lord Jesus Christ. The past few years have taught us something like scorn for the neutral. A non-committal attitude to-day in matters like these simply won't do. There are many questions that one would like to ask about the origin, conduct and possible issues of the Holy War, but this is not the time to ask them. That is not the way to victory. At the height of the Great War there were many questions that men would have liked to have had answered. But when the enemy was dangerous and threatening it was worse than useless to indulge in speculation as to who was to blame for the shell-shortage, who was responsible for this and who had blundered over that. There was only one line of safety for all, and that was to get on with the war. The parallel is complete with the war of Emmanuel against the massed forces of evil. It is futile to hold your hand and to withhold your allegiance until all the questions you would like to ask have been answered. There is, at a time like this, only one burning question, "Why are you not in the King's army ?" "He that lacketh these things is blind, seeing only what

is near"—or, as we would say, is short-sighted ; and is not just this short-sightedness the bane of our age ? " It cannot be wrong to be merry, or useless to be happy, and it is often most refreshing to be frivolous. There is no positive evil in these social relations which occupy so great a part of so many lives. What one has to fear is this—that these occupations, which seem to fill our lives, may in reality empty them ; that they shall provide no nourishment of thought or feeling, no fortifying of will or heart ; that in this whirling mechanism of social obligations one may lose altogether any independent personality, and become one more thoughtless, heedless, soulless wheel performing its revolutions with the rest." What is the peril most besetting our modern social life, if it be not this sort of moral and spiritual neutrality ? " It is not the wickedness of the social world that is most alarming, it is its irresponsibility." There is not so much danger in the sins of society as in the growing insensibility of society. One would almost welcome a decent clean sin in this fœtid atmosphere of snivelling peccadilloes and foul innuendoes. Even to Christian disciples in those early days when the lash of persecution was ever present to " whip the offending Adam out " of them, Peter warns them against the corruption that is in the world by lust and through the omnipresent and prevailing short-sightedness. " Wherefore, brethren, give the more diligence to make *your* calling and election sure : for if ye do these things ye shall never stumble : you will thus be richly furnished with the right of entry into the everlasting Kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ."

Christ's fan is in His hand to-day, and there is need

for a combing out of the neutral and the uncommitted. You believe in the Lord Jesus Christ. With a sting of scorn the Lord's brother retorts to you, "The devils also believe and tremble." You admire the Lord Jesus Christ and would save that gracious figure for the well-being of the community. So did Pilate. Unless you are prepared to do more in a day like this, you are really rather a polite nuisance, a loose pin in the onward sweeping chariot of the King of kings. When great movements are afoot, when the Son of God goes forth to war, you are either on the way or else you are in the way. Christ our Lord has no need of your polite deference ; what He wants is your strong right arm. Henri IV. saw Crillon sidling up to him after a great victory in which he had taken no active part. He was in no mood to receive even congratulations from such a man, and greeted him in these words : "Hang yourself, brave Crillon ! we fought at Arques, and you were not there."

Then shall they on the left hand say, "Lord, when saw we thee ?" And the King shall answer them, saying, "When ? I wonder."

VI

DEGREES OF SPIRITUAL PERCEPTION

“ The multitude therefore, that stood by, and heard it, said that it had thundered ; others said : An angel hath spoken. Jesus said, Father.”—ST. JOHN’S GOSPEL.

To nations and to churches, as to individual men and women, there come great moments, the spring-tides of the soul, when mysterious and awesome forces make themselves felt. At such times it is not unusual for the agitated and perplexed minds of men to feel as if all nature were convulsed, supporting with terrifying portents the apprehension of their own spirits. Such a crisis, they said, occurred at the time of the death of Julius Cæsar.

“ Nor heaven, nor earth, have been at peace to-night.

• • • • •
There is one within,
Besides the things that we have heard and seen,
Recounts most horrid sights seen by the watch.
A lioness hath whelped in the streets ;
And graves have yawn’d, and yielded up their dead ;
Fierce fiery warriors fight upon the clouds,
In ranks, and squadrons, and right form of war,
Which drizzled blood upon the Capitol :
The noise of battle hurtled in the air,
Horses did neigh and dying men did groan ;
And ghosts did shriek and squeal about the streets.”

That was a testing-time when men had to take sides, and to show their colours.

Another and a greater crisis was to follow, not in Rome, but in Jerusalem, when Roman and Greek and Jew were involved—mankind upon its trial. It was the greatest hour in the spiritual history of the world, when the soul of man was being searched. Even in the quiet restraint of the narrative of the Fourth Gospel the reader can feel something of the tense, electric state of the atmosphere. Voices seemed to fill the air ; loud thunders rolled through the firmament. Each had his own interpretation and explanation to offer of the unusual portent. To some—to the great mass of people—the solemn moment seems to have brought no revelation, no quickening of the spirit. *God was breaking into life* ; but all they had to say about it was that there was a big noise—heavy thunder among the Judæan hills. Others, of a greater degree of spiritual perception, caught, if not the words, yet enough to perceive that the noise was articulate speech. They had ears to hear that something unusual was being uttered in that solemn hour. “An angel hath spoken,” they said. But there was One whose religious understanding had reached a still higher stage of development, and He said, “*Father, glorify thy name.*” Whatever the coming days might bring, however He might seem to be “tossed on the sea of human passions, the Father was steadily guiding all to the highest end.” This was the conviction which alone made it possible for Him to face the awful ordeal which lay before Him, the assurance that His death would glorify God, the assurance that He was not throwing His life away.

Once again we have reached one of the world-crises, an epoch when even the most obtuse is aware that great

happenings are afoot. To-day, as then, there are to be found the three distinct stages or degrees of spiritual perception, in the light of which the several classes of men are interpreting the phenomena of the times.

1. As in the days of our Lord, the great mass of men are crassly dull and unresponsive to the striking and arresting manifestations which are going on around them. In such the development of the religious understanding is at the lowest stage. They are conscious indeed—who could well fail to be—that something unusual, something to engage the attention and even appeal to the imagination, is happening. They are aware that at any rate the world is reverberating with a big noise. And they are ready with their glib explanation. It is the thunder of the guns and the rumble of unrest. “The multitude therefore, that stood by, and heard it, said that it thundered.” That is all they have to say. Those who are content merely to “stand by” when great movements are afoot, are usually unable to see very deeply into the heart of anything. We perpetually wonder, it may be that we are even pained, because the great majority of people seem so incapable of realising the tremendous import, spiritually, socially, and morally, of the events that are happening around us to-day. Whatever they may all mean and whatever they may ultimately issue in, of one thing we may be certain, that you have not explained them when you refer them merely to naturalistic causes.

And yet there have always been many who have felt perfectly satisfied, and have thought that others ought to be satisfied with a naturalistic interpretation of spiritual things. You would have said that in the

presence of Jesus men would surely have had their eyes opened to see into the heart of the great calls of life. But then, as to-day, the multitude could hear, in that which was to Jesus the very voice of God, nothing but the dull rumble of distant thunder. It is possible to have witnessed all the mighty works which Jesus has done, more in number and significance to-day and in the centuries since He was here in the flesh, and yet to be as unenlightened about it all as the multitude who stood loafing around that day, and said, "Did you hear the thunder?"

We see the same spiritual dullness exhibited in the case of the men who accompanied Saul of Tarsus on the road to Damascus. That something startling happened on the road is evident. It was seen and heard by Saul and all his companions ; all saw a light and heard a sound ; but to Saul of Tarsus it was an entirely different experience than to his fellow-travellers. To them the whole thing was just a great blaze-up. Saul saw in it the Figure of Jesus calling him to a new life, a life of real service. They heard a confused noise ; he heard a voice speaking personally to him. The noise they heard and the light they saw appear to have made no permanent religious impression on Saul's escort ; but Saul of Tarsus underwent a change that completely altered his career and has left an indelible impress on the history of mankind. The same light and the same noise—what different results !

And so it isn't the war that is going to work a change in men's minds, as some seemed to hope. Two years of peace and of time for reflection, and the multitude are no nearer the truth than they were before. They have come through the most soul-

searching experience of a millennium without any acquired sense of an Invisible Companion. "It thundered, with a capital T," is all they have to say about the tremendous experience. Nothing seems to awaken the religious faculty in some people. They find it hard to keep silent for two minutes on 11th November—they who will some day not very far distant keep the great silence for ever.

2. But they were not all so dense who stood around our Lord that momentous day. There were others who knew this was no ordinary thunder. The divine was in it ; the angel of the unseen was almost brushing them with his wings as he went by them. God had become articulate in their drab lives, and their souls were awake. "An angel hath spoken," they said. It was far nearer the truth than the glib explanation of the others, although falling far short of the sublime truth. It is a cause for thankfulness that at least a few in the crowd have reached this higher stage of religious understanding and spiritual development. They are convinced that an angel has been speaking, if it be but the angel of pain and death. No naturalistic interpretation of the tremendous happenings of the past years can possibly satisfy them. To their minds and consciences it is simply grotesque to explain the upheaval in the world of men as due merely to the loosing of the accumulated thunder of the nations' guns. Was Mons a matter of guns only, and not of the steadfast souls of men ? Have you explained the Marne when you have said, It thundered ? And when the great tides of the soul are astir, your naturalistic interpretations are not only inadequate—they are a monstrous impertinence.

Do you ask why it is that the same phenomenon can be so differently felt and so diversely interpreted by different men ? Apples innumerable have tumbled from trees in the orchard closes without suggesting anything more to those who watched than a high wind or a dumpling, until at Woolsthorpe one fell into a mind teeming with thought, and brought to Newton the discovery of the law which binds the worlds about the throne of God. Many a boy had heard the kettle sing at his mother's fire, and learnt nothing from that song, until the Greenock lad saw the steam not only lifting the kettle lid, but driving the nations' commerce about the world. The fact that the cause of Jesus could not be overthrown, that Jesus Himself could not be banished from God's earth by the will of wicked men, ought to have been clear to every one ; but it was only the faith of a chosen few, and the enlightened conscience of Saul of Tarsus, that made the discovery. The reality of God should be the most patent fact in the universe ; but we cannot yet banish the words atheist and agnostic from our dictionaries.

3. But there was One present that day who had the perfect explanation of the mystery which was engaging their attention and challenging their interpretation. In Him the spirit was so alert, the religious comprehension so fully developed, that He missed nothing of the significance of that great hour. That which deafened the ears or clouded the brows of others, brought the smile of glad content to His lips. No thunder this, nor even unknown angel visitant, but the voice of His Father.

This is the highest degree of spiritual perception,

an explanation which really explains, when speculation passes into knowledge.

“Where one heard thunder, and one saw flame,
I only know He named my name.”

What seems to you but the sultry rumbling of an overcharged atmosphere, is to a more spiritual mind full of infinite spiritual possibilities. Where at the most you are convinced of the presence of some vague psychic manifestation—an angel—the man of quickened religious susceptibility is hearing the very accents of God, calling him to personal dealings.

I think our reading of the signs of the times, our interpretation of the portents which are engaging all men's minds, will depend partly upon how far we have hitherto been careful to train our spiritual powers, and partly upon our attitude now to the soul-travail of the world. The hour was a critical one, not only for the whole world, but in particular for Jesus Himself. Not to those “standing by” in idle curiosity or half-hearted indifference, wondering what would turn up next, but to the One who was walking in the path of service and sacrifice that He might redeem the world and lead it back to righteousness and God, was the true reading of the riddle vouchsafed. Pain and suffering, seeming defeat and death there might be, but the outcome of all would be the glory of God. And once He was sure of that, Jesus could face up to all that life and death might demand of Him. He had listened to the confused noises of the age, and had heard, not the grinding of a soulless machine, nor the uncertain rendering of a fitful melody, but His Father's voice.

Once again the world is crying out in travail. Does it sound in our ears like the anguish of death, or as the prelude to a new birth? Is it terrifying thunder merely, or something deeper and more significant? "The voice of the Lord is upon the waters: the God of glory thundereth. . . . In his temple everything saith, Glory." Those who have the *inside* knowledge are convinced, as the apostle put it, that "all things are working together for good." Everything saith, Glory: the pain, the loss, the garden of Gethsemane and the cross of Calvary. "He that hath ears to hear," said Jesus, "let him hear." How do you hear, and how do you interpret what you hear? Proximity to Christ in the flesh did not guarantee nearness to Him in spirit. The surroundings of a Christian civilisation can do nothing for you unless you are doing something to develop the ear that hears and the mind that can understand. The most urgent voice preaching the sublimest message from the Christian pulpit will sound to one hearer just like the reverberation of stage thunder. To yet another the words are, at best, those of a stranger. But always there are some who go down to their own house convinced that they have heard the voice of their heavenly Father speaking through these means the word they needed.

St. Paul has let us far into the secret of things when he has told us that he was not disobedient to the heavenly vision which came to him. If he had been, it is not unlikely that he would some day have come to the conclusion that his companions, and not he, were right. There had been a blinding light and a bewildering noise, but it might after all have been explained in various materialistic ways. What really

convinced Paul was the life and growing experience into which his vision led him. "People might tell him that he had had a sunstroke ; but he knew that, sunstroke or something else, he had been led into a career of usefulness ; that life had assumed a new meaning and fascination for him ; that depths of joy and peace and hope had been opened up ; that he had passed into a friendship he could only adequately describe by saying that he knew the God and Father of Jesus Christ. As he obeyed the impulses that came upon him with mastering force in that hour of prostration, life disclosed its unsearchable riches for him. He saw and kept seeing what he had been blind to until now. . . . He heard and kept hearing the assuring voice within saying, 'Abba, Father,' and giving him that sonship with the Lord of heaven and earth, which had been the distinguishing characteristic of the Jesus whose followers he had hunted down to death. . . . Years after the startling day on the Damascus road, when life's experience had turned in its accumulated evidence, he wrote confidently, 'I know whom I have believed.' "

This is the universal experience, this the difference between a sunstroke and salvation, between a clap of thunder and the clasp of the hand of God, that a man should be true to the great moments of the soul. "Visions obeyed remain visions, the master lights of all our seeing, but disobeyed they turn into illusions."

"Light obeyed increaseth light :
Light rejected bringeth night."

How are you going to face the coming days ? Have you made an armistice with fear and doubt ? That

was the one thing that mattered in our Lord's eyes. He could go on to anything provided that He knew whose hand passed Him the mixed cup of life. How are you going on to meet your Gethsemane and to face your Calvary ? Do you think you can do it in the strength of a crude materialism ? Do you rely for succour on the comfort of a ghostly spiritualism ? There was only one thing that made it possible for our Lord to go on—the conviction that He had heard the Father's voice, and that His times were in the Father's hands. Then life could make no demand too severe, and death could take from Him nothing that really mattered. With a prayer He goes forward, " Father, glorify thy name." And the confidence is rewarded ; the prayer is heard and answered. " I have both glorified it, and, through your great gift of yourself, I will glorify it again."

VII

HIS OWN CLOTHES

THERE are certain incidents in great dramas, seemingly, perhaps, small and trivial in themselves, which have a way of burning themselves ineffaceably into the memory of the participant. For no apparent reason, you can recall vividly, perchance the pattern of the carpet in the room where you happened to be pacing when some bit of heavy news was brought you ; or the scent that came floating in at the window, or the whistle of the boy in the street. And these "tremendous trifles" will remain with you through all the years, long after you have forgotten some of the more outstanding features of your experiences on that never-to-be-forgotten occasion.

We wonder, sometimes, why the Evangelists did not tell us some of the things about Jesus we would have given much to know : about His personal appearance, the days of His childhood, and even more about the closing scenes of His earthly life. How was it that this seemingly unimportant fact had so impressed itself upon the imagination of St. Matthew and St. Mark, that when the soldiers had finished their brutal sport they took off the purple from Him, and gave Him back His own garment ? They never forgot how the enemies of Jesus dressed Him up to mock Him ; but they put

His own clothes on Him when He went forth to die for the redemption of mankind. During one hour of shame the malice of men had tried to conceal the greatness of that Figure by the tawdry splendour of purple and scarlet. But when they had finished their poor jesting they put on Him again the seamless robe which loving hands had woven ; and clad in the simple majesty of a man they led Him out. "They took off the purple from him, and put his own clothes on him."

The touch is not such an insignificant one in the great picture as we with our holden eyes have perhaps been in the habit of thinking. "He was thus mocked, not in His own clothes, but in another's," says Matthew Henry, "to signify that He suffered not for His own sin." But more significant, surely, is the fact that when He went forth to His last crowning act of sacrifice and redemption, He went, clad in the purple pomp of no alien splendour, but in something that fitted and be-fitted Him—those clothes which the woman in the crowd had found so healing, that white robe at whose folds the children had clutched, those garments which He had laid aside to stoop and wash the feet of Judas and the feet of His friends. It was the Jesus whom they knew, not a lay figure robed in borrowed finery, who went forth to suffer and to die for the world.

This is a saving truth which needs to be emphasized to-day. There has been a way of presenting Christ, setting Him forth in purple rhetoric, and concealing the real majesty and greatness of His figure by clothing Him in the discarded splendour of an alien philosophy. No wonder enemies have mocked and friends have failed to recognise Him. You can't dress that Figure

up to conform to your conception of the trappings of royalty. Put on Him His own clothes, and let Him go forth to do His redemptive work. These are the only garments from which healing goes forth. These are the clothes in which the people will recognise Him.

When Jesus stood there on His trial before Pilate and the eyes of the world, Matthew through moist eyes got an impression that they had dressed Him up in scarlet ; Peter told Mark long afterwards that his impression was that it was purple ; while John mentions no colour, saying only that it was “gorgeous apparel.” In any case, they all felt that it was something unreal and out of place. It was a mockery of a profound fact, a travesty of a great truth. And when that Figure is on trial to-day it is the garments some of us have made Him wear which hide His identity from the eyes of men. When we put His own clothes on Him He still goes forth to redeem the world.

This you remember was what so astonished the multitude in the preaching of the early disciples. They were convinced because they heard, each in his own tongue, the mighty works of God. It was preaching which came home to their hearts and which they could understand. They saw the Saviour of the world, because Peter and the others had stripped off the artificial covering and put on Him His own clothes. And this is the perpetual demand of the world, “Sir, we would see Jesus,” not something dressed up to conform to your ideas of kingship,—for these as likely as not will but misrepresent Him and mock His claims,—but in His own clothes. Such a stalwart of evangelicalism as Erskine of Linlathen, for example, writing to a correspondent, says : “The more I think of our con-

versations about the different places which belong to the subjective and the objective in religion, the more I am persuaded that it is impossible that we can mean different things. I think only that you insist too much on conventional language, which I feel called on to avoid, because I find that it is so often used to stand in the place of the thing itself." And from a very different quarter, Mr. H. G. Wells echoes the same kind of thought. "Every religious body, every religious teacher, has appreciated the need there is of reminders and renewals. Faith needs restatement and revival as the body needs food." Some would dress that Figure in scarlet ; others would parade Him in purple or other gorgeous apparel ; and immediately we not only disagree, but, worse still, we but succeed in disguising Him and making Him appear unworthy of the reverence and worship of men. If only we would put on Him His own clothes and not our own highly coloured garments ! Each succeeding age does what those Roman soldiers did, it strips off the trappings which others had put about the figure of Christ, and instead of diminishing aught of His kingliness, the greatness of that Figure does but the more stand out in Divine simplicity, compelling anew the homage of men.

This great fact of the rediscovery of Jesus Christ by each succeeding age has been stated in memorable form by Thomas Carlyle in his chapter on "Church-clothes" in *Sartor Resartus*. "In our era of the World those same Church-clothes have gone sorrowfully out-at-elbows ; nay, far worse, many of them have become mere hollow shapes, under which no living figure or Spirit any longer dwells." But, he goes on, "Religion in unnoticed nooks is weaving for herself new

vestures, wherewith to reappear, and bless us, or our sons or grandsons." The purple and scarlet are torn off, and men cry out that the old forms are being discarded. But He who is Truth remains unchanged ; and all the stripping but means that once again men may catch a glimpse—a saving glimpse—of Him as He goes out again, clad in His own clothes, to the redemption of the world.

But in addition to that intellectual aspect of the words of the evangelist there is a moral truth suggested by them which is worthy of our careful consideration. In their rough and brutal way those who dressed up our Lord had sought to give expression to a true idea. Jesus was a prophet ; He was a priest ; He was a king. But though everybody had a kind of feeling in their bones that this might be so,—the high priest and rulers of the Jews in their uneasiness strove all the night to try and get Him to make some clear declaration that would save them from the trouble of facing a great moral issue for themselves, and at the same time save them from what they half feared might be the commission of the greatest crime in history. Pilate also agonised with his strange Prisoner to get at the bottom of this business of the kingship, risking his reputation of loyalty to Cæsar, in order if possible to arrive at the truth of the matter. Yet Jesus had not shown Himself in the manner in which they had expected. The Jewish rulers had looked for a great *prophet* in Him, but they had looked for the wrong kind of manifestation, and they were doomed to disappointment. And their disappointment showed itself in the way in which they chose to torture Him. They blindfolded Him, and

then struck Him, and said, with unspeakable coarseness : “ Prophesy : who is it that struck thee ? ” The soldiers on the other hand had heard all the talk about Him being a *king*. But how vastly this humble Galilean disappointed the Roman idea of a king. And so the soldiers took it out of Him by mocking Him as a king. And once again, there were those who had thought of Him as a *priest* and *saviour* of their nation. But their crude hopes had been bound to disappointment at the hands of one so spiritual. And so that portion of the crowd abused him on the cross as a saviour. “ If thou be the Christ, save thyself and come down from the cross.”

Of course we see to-day how false were the conceptions of prophet, of kingship, and of saviourhood that Jesus had disappointed in those who so misunderstood and so abused Him. We see to-day how perfect a prophet He was, how great a king, how wise and mighty a saviour. But do we not all make the same kind of moral mistake ? Here, for example, is a man who was prepared to bow the knee to Jesus of Nazareth. But he found that that meant that there were certain things which he could not make altogether plain to his intellect. He found that belief in Jesus Christ was going to make certain demands upon faith as well as reason. And immediately, in our Lord’s word, he was “ offended,” and not only withdrew the allegiance which he ought to have given, but mocked that religion which appealed to something more than his intellect.

Or here again was another who was prepared to make Jesus king. But he soon found that the kingship of Christ meant the complete destruction of certain things

in his life which were not compatible with loyalty to Christ. And the demand made upon him was too much ; and now the very thought of the kingship of Christ makes him wince, and is an idea that he hates and even caricatures.

Or here again is a passionate but dogmatic social reformer who thought he saw in Jesus of Nazareth the leader who would countenance all his cherished views. But that man from Nazareth demands something more than our genial patronage ; and now he wags his head and rails and says in effect, “If thou be the Christ, come down from the cross and save thyself and us.”

Or it may be just that it was ourself, who felt Him near once, knew in one ineffable moment the directness of His call to us, admitted His right to the lordship of our lives, but—held back.

“ And sometimes horror chills our blood
To be so near such mystic things,
And we wrap round us for defence
Our purple manners, moods of sense—
As angels from the face of God
Stand hidden in their wings.”

We refuse to see Him as He is, and then try to make ourselves believe that He has eluded us.

If that be your plight, there is only one way back to glad certainty and confident centrality of faith. I cannot state it better than it was put in the inscription which the President of the United States of America wrote for placing in the millions of Bibles presented to the American soldiers and sailors going forth to bear their part in the great fight for freedom. “ The Bible is the word of life. I beg that you will read it and find this out for yourselves,—

read, not little snatches here and there, but long passages that will really be the road to the heart of it. You will find it full of real men and women, but also of things you have wondered about and been troubled about all your life, as men have been always ; and the more you read the more it will become plain to you what things are worth while and what are not : what things make men happy—loyalty, right dealings, speaking the truth, readiness to give everything for what they think their duty, and, most of all, the wish that they may have the real approval of the Christ, who gave everything for them ; and the things that are guaranteed to make men unhappy—selfishness, cowardice, greed, and everything that is low and mean." In other words, don't be satisfied to see Jesus in the garments which other men have put upon Him ; do not even leave Him in the robes which your own fancy had woven of how He would appear or how His religion should seem to you ; but see Him with His own clothes on Him, and see if this be not for you also saviour and redeemer.

His enemies thought that that was the last of the kingship of Jesus when they stripped Him of the purple, and put on Him His own clothes. Why, it was only the beginning of His reign ! The world is always trying to belittle its great men. Subsequent writers have tried again and again to strip, as they thought, the purple pretensions from off this one and that of the world's heroes and great names. But the more the real man appeared in his own garb the more he has won the admiration and devotion of mankind. There seemed to be so little pomp and glory in the going out of our

lads who went to bear their share of the cross of suffering laid upon the shoulders of humanity by the military tyranny of the day. But is it not better so? Do they not appear far kinglier and greater in their own homely naturalness? As the Poet Laureate has sung of them :

" dear Youth, who lightly in the day of fury
Put on England's glory as a common coat."

To one who knew not the secret of the spring it would seem all mad loss that the rough winds of October should rage and strip the trees of their apparel of purple and scarlet and gold, leaving us only bare trunks and forlorn branches. Yet is it the preparation for the manifestation of God's miracle of spring and resurrection. Man feels, and always will feel, that there is a royal dignity to which he should aspire, a glory of purple and scarlet which is his by right. But is not the lesson which the Lord of all good life taught us, the one which all human sacrifice and self-denial for the sake of others teaches every day: that when we strive to wrap about us some tawdry weaving of our own purple, we but hide our true greatness and display a figure for men's mocking? But when we go forth in our own clothes, clad in that personality which God gave us to use and wear, we are permitted to take our share in the final redemption of the world.

VIII

THE EXITS OF THE SOUL

IN many respects the temple architecture described in the forty-second chapter of the prophet Ezekiel is strikingly true of that growth by which we “are builded together for a habitation of God through the Spirit.” We seem to know this building as well as Ezekiel himself, in which “the upper chambers were shorter: for the galleries took away from these, more than from the lower and the middlemost, in the building.” We know how it is always the upper chambers of life that are the first to suffer from those excrescences which, in the prophet’s expressive phrase, “eat away” the higher. “For they were in three stories, and they had not pillars as the pillars of the courts: therefore the uppermost was straitened more than the lowest and the middlemost from the ground.” It all seems as obvious as the *Pilgrim’s Progress* once you get a key to the allegory. We know these three stories of the flesh, the mind, and the spirit, and how always it is the uppermost which seems to suffer straitening.

But this is an expression which may be taken as setting forth the relation of the soul of man to the call of God: “All their goings out were both according to their fashions, and according to their doors.” It is the self-expression of the soul that concerns us most

both in ourselves and in those with whom we have to do. So long as the spirit of a man remains immured within the walls of being he is as nothing to me. " Speak, that I may know you," said the old Greek poet. It is the exits of the soul that matter most. Not until the man has come forth and given me of himself in his book or his picture or his composition ; not until the soul has sallied forth in some form of expression, be it by look or word or deed, can I know what sort of an inhabitant the temple houses.

What calls forth the inner soul of another ? It is the challenge of the note your bugle blows, the expression of your personality. Some there are on whom your loudest blast will make no impression whatsoever : others will rush incontinent out of doors at the faintest winding of your horn. Some respond readily to every outside stimulus, and we deem them emotional—they are perpetually moving out of themselves, that is : others are phlegmatic—it would take an earthquake to make their cautious heads show over their sullen and silent battlements. Those who expose themselves for our delight or criticism in their special self-chosen line of utterance are responding to the total impression of the sum of things made upon them by the universe. They feel that they must make their response to the call of the universe without stopping to consider the consequences or inquiring too narrowly what has brought them forth : just as you go out of doors on a bright morning, impelled by countless motives which you do not stop to analyse. The genial warmth of the sun, the singing of the birds, the donning of her spring garments by Nature—all these have something to do with it, and besides, an indefinable something within

yourself that calls for movement, for response of some kind if it be only to enjoy it all with appreciation and gratitude. Amazingly different is the response made by different natures. Some see the fresh green or tender blossom and it awakens in them merely an un-holy itch to pluck it with hot blighting hands. Others, like Heine, feel that they must lay upon it hands of tender prayer, beseeching God's blessing and protection upon all the delicate and beautiful things of life ; or it may waken a desire to make some further contribution to the sum of beauty and goodness where-with God has blessed and enriched the world. When God's bugle blows, every man makes some kind of reply, if it be only to bar his door a little tighter and hug a little closer his darling sin. The highest response the soul of man is capable of making we call prayer. So Jesus heard the royal trumpeters that glad morning when he signalled back : " I thank thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth."

Now it is just round this matter of the release or outflow of the spirit of man that the whole business and battle of life is conducted. It is the craving for self-expression in man that leads to all the beautiful things that are done, and at the same time it is this same craving which, when unguided and uncontrolled, is the source of all the mischief which is done in the world. Our Lord, who knew what was in man, knew how that which was within sought release, craved for expression and fulfilment. The true function of religion is not so much prohibition or inhibition, as exhibition. Of the Good Shepherd it is said that He leadeth the members of His flock out, leads them out into all adventure and self-fulfilment. Surely if man is made

in the image of God, made by and for His pleasure, then the touch of His Spirit on our lives should result in arousing all our faculties to their highest and their best expression. Life should grow richer, not poorer, because God has entered it. The pent-up soul should thereafter be released to its fullest freedom. We need not remind ourselves how utterly different has the thought of the coming of God into their lives appeared to many, until religion has actually been thought of as that which slowed down the glad activities of life and robbed it of vitality.

In this vision of Ezekiel, this temple of God as it ought to be, the exit of the soul into experience and expression which at its highest and purest we call religion, is represented, not as something forced and unnatural, but as, what indeed it is, the normal development of life. "All their goings out were both according to their fashions, and according to their doors." That is to say, the ways out were both obvious and natural. There was nothing forced or strange about it. Each found exit and expression according to his own bent and circumstance. Well did our Lord describe Himself as "he that openeth, and none shall shut," for over and over again in the history of the world and of the Church misguided persons have tried to shut every man up to the one and the same mode of religious expression. Before He left this world our Lord warned His disciples against this very tendency of which we are speaking. "If, therefore, they shall say unto you, Behold, he is in the wilderness; go not forth: Behold, he is in the secret chambers; believe it not. For as the lightning cometh forth from the east, and is seen

even unto the west ; so shall be the presence of the Son of man." Isn't that exactly what has happened ? Some have tried to make us believe that Christ was only to be found in the bare wilderness experiences of life. They have represented religion as a dreary, ascetic thing. They have maintained, against all the pleading of common sense, that He who loved birds and flowers and children and all the dear homely ways and companionships of human nature, who came eating and drinking the rich experiences of life, had changed His mind, and adopted the Baptist's view of life. They have tried to make us believe that only through negation could we find the presence of Christ. If they tell you that, said Jesus, you can save yourselves the trouble of a barren and cheerless journey. " If they shall say unto you, Behold, he is in the wilderness ; go not forth."

And the other part of our Lord's warning has been no less necessary. For there have been, and still are amongst us those who allege that spiritual experience is a purely mystical, esoteric, unreal experience. They would have us believe that it is an affair of closed doors, of darkened inner chambers and hothouse forcing ; not a possession for the many but a privilege for the neurotic few. " Don't you believe it," said Jesus. " If they tell you that My Presence is only to be found within the narrow and stuffy confines of their little sects, just laugh at them. If they shall say unto you, Behold, He is in the secret chambers ; believe it not. My coming to the hearts of men will be as big and natural and obvious as the flashing lightning." Religion is a healthy, out-of-doors affair. There is nothing mysterious or far-fetched about it. It is something

that everybody can see and understand and be familiar with. And so has the shining of the presence of Christ been, an affair of flashing and leaping and electric beauty, the good news for the modern west and for the ancient east alike. The lightning has defied all our little barriers of time and space and continent and language ; strong to smite all who play with such terrific force, and yet coming gently into our homes to light and warm and cheer them. “ As the lightning cometh forth from the east, and is seen even unto the west ; so shall be the presence of the Son of man.”

Now, can we find confirmation of all this in the records available of the actual ways in which Christ has come into the lives of men and women, and given them that for which they craved, as every healthy human being should crave,—soul-exit and self-expression ? The experiencing of the power of God, the realised presence of Christ, communion, fellowship and revelation of the Unseen,—call the vital fact what you will,—comes in different ways to different people, but always it comes, not only as no violation of their natural development, but rather as the only way that leads to fulness and fruitfulness of life. As George MacDonald says, Christ comes to each of us “ down His own secret stair ” ; or, in the words of Ezekiel, all the goings out of our souls are “ both according to their fashions, and according to their doors.”

Chrysostom has put this cheering and suggestive fact in his own way when he says that “ God caught the Magi with a star, the fishermen with a fish.” It was when each was at his own proper work, following the prompting of his own particular bent, “ according to their fashions ”—or their “ make,” as we would say,

that each made for himself and in his own way the greater find, and went forth through his own particular door to the greatest soul-adventure of all. God may not catch you, as He has caught many another, through a sermon or a tract. His lures are more varied and subtle than that. But there is not any worthy opening in life which does not lead on to a wider and bigger vista than seemed at first likely.

Sometimes the presence of the living Christ is discerned intuitively when least expected. She was not looking for Him as anything more than a precious burden of dead days ; but in one moment of insight Mary Magdalene realised that she was talking to no gardener of earthly blooms. Intuition is perhaps the form the revealing angel might be expected to take in the case of a sympathetic woman.

Very different was the experience of the two at Emmaus. To them the revelation came through the grosser experience of eating. "He was made known in the breaking of bread." So He is still. Through means that seem to you and me uninspiring enough the revelation comes to another.

Or take the case of those fishermen. The first thing that opened their eyes to the presence and possibilities of Christ in their lives was the unlikely circumstance of their making the biggest catch they had ever known. There are some whom God can trust to be awakened to their spiritual responsibilities by granting them the most striking success in their business they have ever known. The shame is that some don't recognise the Lord of their lives even then. They come through the most successful year of their lives without any spiritual thank-offering. God can't find it very

encouraging. But there are some whose hearts have so been warmed into better things.

And there are others, like the Apostle Paul, who come to the truth only through weakness, as a wounded animal instinctively finds out the water-brooks. They have been too clever, knew too much, needed too little,—as they thought. And God in His mercy has blinded them with seeing tears in the very road of their self-will and on the way to the Damascus of their determination—with the goal almost in sight.

The point is that in each case the going out into fulness of life was through the door that was “according to their fashion.” According to the Jewish legend the manna tasted different to each Israelite, having for each the sweetness of that which he specially liked. The manna of God is one, bread for the satisfaction of our hunger in the wilderness ; but it tastes differently for each partaker. In each of the typical cases I have chosen in which Christ made Himself known after His resurrection, none of them realised at first with whom they had to do. It only gradually dawned upon them that Christ had come into their lives.

“ *All* their goings out,” says the prophet, were a natural part of the whole. And so it is that the Psalmist can confidently assert that it is “ the Lord who made heaven and earth ” who will keep a man’s goings out and his comings in. God is not so nervous about the action of the natural pull of spiritual gravitation in the heart of man as some good people are. “ Afterward he brought me to the gate,” says the prophet in the beginning of the next chapter. When a man begins by going gladly out at the little door that opens to him, he is gradually brought to the

bigger exit of the gate, whence, as Ezekiel says, he sees "the glory of the God of Israel come from the way of the east." All roads lead to Christ. Any kind of faithfulness, every pure enthusiasm, is a foot-path to lead a man into the Way.

The coming of Christ into a life is as the coming of the Prince in the children's story. He is strong to break through all the tangle of opposition. He alone can sound the great music that wakes into full being all the activities of the house of life. Then do the servants fly to their posts, and the doors and windows open, and the wheels are spinning once again. And in the innermost chamber of all, the kiss of the Prince awakes the sleeping soul to life and beauty.

This is life, this is salvation, this is religion,—hearing the call of Christ and going out according to your own peculiar fashion and through your own special door to the warfare of God and the service of man. You remember that incident in the *Life of Robin Hood*, when his trusty lieutenant in one of their madcap adventures dressed himself up as a menial and found employment as a servant in the house of their most inveterate foe. But gradually that which had been done for bravado and in a spirit of adventure was like to have ended disastrously; for the man became so enamoured of the safe and easy life and the regular hours and the assured living that he yielded to the softness of it, and abode in the mean thraldom. Day after day Robin Hood looked in vain for the return of his old comrade.

But one bright summer morning when Long John was lying in his too comfortable bed, with the other scents and sounds of summer there was wafted through

the open window the faint, far echo of the music of Robin Hood's horn summoning his men to him under the greenwood tree. And deep shame awoke in the heart of the miscreant, till the challenge of that music became intolerable, and slipping out of the castle he regained his old comrades and their life of freedom and adventure.

One knows only too well the fatal attraction of the easier way, the thraldom to the spirit of the world, and the materialistic creed that nothing matters but the service of the moment and the pursuit of pleasure and ease. Not that one meant to yield for one moment to anything so base ; only we had misjudged its attraction and its power. And then there is salvation in the hearing once again of the bugle-call of our Leader. "It's a shame to stay indoors on a day like this," we sometimes say to one another, when the sun is shining and everything speaks of fresh life and hope and long hours to be filled with wholesome exercise. And that is the kind of motive that drives us forth to bigger and better things in such a day as this is. It is a time of infinite possibilities, of voices that call and unseen hands that beckon. Come out and show yourself ! Come out and give yourself away ! "See, I have set before thee an open door." Come out and join the eager hearts and busy hands that are building in hope ! Obey the promptings of your own best nature. Hark to the bugle-call of our Leader summoning His followers around Him for new enterprise and fresh achievement ! Come boldly out for Christ ! Come out ! It *is* a shame to stay indoors on a day like this !

IX

THE SNARE OF THE SOUTH WIND

THE New Testament writers seem to have been profoundly impressed with the infinite possibility of tragedy for those who were the victims of mistaken suppositions. There were, for example, the men in our Lord's parable, who had not only failed to study the conditions of the labour market, but had miscalculated the whole basis of existence, with the consequence that, in the end of the day, they were grievously disappointed with the scheme of things. "They supposed that they would receive more." Joseph and Mary also were content for a time to proceed upon an easy-going supposition, with the result that they lost the presence of Jesus for a time. "Supposing him to have been in the company" they went unconcernedly on. They went one day without Him, but it took them three days of sorrowful and anxious seeking to find Him again. No single member of any Christian community can take it for granted that Jesus is in the company. He may have left it through the carelessness and indifference of those who did not realise that His vital presence might be lost long before it was even missed.

There are the mistaken suppositions of the friends of the Christian religion, of those who take the central Figure either for something too impalpable, as when the

disciples twice over supposed that they beheld a spirit ; or of those who make the opposite mistake of taking Him for something less than He is, as when, with Mary, they suppose Him to be only a working man. And there are the equally wrong suppositions of the enemies of the Christian religion, of those who mistake the spirit and method of its followers. “ These are not intoxicated, as ye suppose,” was the first word of Christian apologetic. And if that low gibe was but the passing jest of the vulgar mob, there was a bitterness ever watchful and ready to misconstrue each action of the Christian disciple. The very presence of Trophimus the Ephesian in the city of Jerusalem, gave rise to the ready supposition that Paul had taken him into the unlawful precincts of the Temple. We are warned also of the fatal consequences to the religious leader who acts prematurely or without due consideration of all the signs of the times. Moses, we read, “ supposed that his brethren understood how that God by his hand was giving them deliverance ; but they understood not.” Men are slow to recognise the forces and institutions that are really working for their welfare, and the religious leader and social reformer will receive some heart-breaking disappointments who imagines that enthusiasm can ever afford to be divorced from common sense.

And on the other hand, for our perpetual encouragement we are told that the enemies of the faith make just as great mistakes. “ They stoned Paul, and dragged him out of the city, supposing that he was dead.” But he wasn’t ! They made the biggest mistake of their lives, not only in stoning the apostle, but still more in supposing that they had put an end to

him and the Gospel he preached. And the stoning still goes on, and men fling religion out of their lives, and do their best to drag it out of the city and the state ; but they know not the resurrection power in the Church of Christ who suppose that she is dead.

But there is one supposition of which we are all apt to become the victims, religious and irreligious alike. It is what we might call the ever-present *snare of the South Wind*. The mariners of the ship in which St. Paul sailed for Italy, "when the south wind blew softly, supposing that they had obtained their purpose, weighed anchor." It was, perhaps, a natural enough supposition, the kind of probability upon which we all must act every day if we are to get anything done at all. They had passed through an anxious time, "sailing slowly many days," and had won their earlier objectives with considerable difficulty, against contrary winds and under dangerous lees, and had at length made Fair Havens. The south wind was blowing softly at last ; everything looked kindly and promising ; it all seemed to be plain sailing. But Paul, who had made sail-cloth in his day, and, like so many Christian missionaries since his time, could turn his hand to almost anything, being an expert in most of them, warned them of the danger of taking too much for granted just because the immediate prospect was hopeful. But as many and many a time since, "the centurion gave more heed to the master and to the owner of the ship, than to those things which were spoken by Paul." The centurion, the master, and the owner of the ship—the army, the government, and the people, do they ever take the Church quite seriously, although they seem to

show it some respect and consideration, as Julius did to St. Paul ? But the apostle did not let himself be discouraged by the seeming indifference to his message and advice. After all, he had delivered his soul, and done his duty when he had given due warning of the result of a certain line of conduct. And when, later on, those on board suffered the consequences of their neglect of the apostolic warning, St. Paul was the first to help them in the catastrophe brought about through their wilfulness. Let us not be unduly discouraged if the Church seems to be addressing deaf ears and self-confident minds ; not even if she be practically told to mind her own business, and leave the sailing of the ship of State to those whose affair it is. The man of prayer and sanctified common sense will continue to give the community his sympathetic counsel ; and so far from being embittered by the apparent failure of his endeavours, he will be the foremost to help and cheer with spiritual comfort and practical assistance when the storm which he foresaw breaks upon the vessel.

It is almost unnecessary to point the striking resemblance of the situation in which those mariners found themselves to that in which we find ourselves to-day. The apostle's advice to us, standing on the eve of what promises to be the last and most momentous stage of the voyage of the ship of humanity to the Eternal City, would be to *take an earnest and prayerful and commonsense look around and ahead*. You cannot sail either the ship of State or the more delicate craft of the human soul, on *suppositions*, however hopeful and alluring they may seem. It is not a matter of religion merely, it simply isn't good seamanship to

take any risks in a matter like this. We are well aware of the temptation. We have been sailing slowly many days, and now that the wind seems to be with us there is a not unnatural longing to let out full sail and run. We almost feel that we have a right to, after all we have suffered and come through. People are speaking and acting in certain quarters as if they supposed we had obtained our purpose just because we have defeated Prussia. The south wind is blowing softly, and in the right direction, therefore they think it is safe to loose out. They seem to be quite ready to break away from all moorings, social, moral, and religious.

“Sirs, I perceive that this voyage will be with injury and much loss, not only of the lading and the ship, but also of our lives.” It is not the voice of old-fashioned religion, so much as that of foreseeing common sense. St. Paul was no kill-joy or hide-bound conservative. He was as anxious to get to Rome as any of them, and had purer and loftier motives for his anxiety. But Rome could not be reached in a day. He does not need to be anything out-of-the-way as a prophet who foresees the difficulties that lie ahead of the nations of Europe. Socially, morally, and spiritually there are plenty of weather-warnings that Euroclydon is working up for a big blow, and that the storms we have encountered may prove nothing to those into which a rash and godless steersmanship may run us all. Paul and Julius, and the master and the owner, we are all in the same ship together; and the safety of one is the safety of all. It is sometimes urged against the Church of Christ that she cares only for the souls of those on board

without showing anxiety for their general well-being. Well, that was not the case with St. Paul, and I don't think it would be the case to-day if we all got together in helpful counsel. "The lading and the ship" were quite as much in the thought and on the heart of the apostle as the immortal souls, although naturally and properly these were his main care. Organise ; look ahead ; take no foolish risks in the elation of the moment ; do not hastily break away from safe moorings and sheltered roadsteads. That is the apostolic admonition as we ride for the moment in the welcome relief of Fair Havens. Can Paul and Julius and the master and the owner not all come close together for counsel and encouragement ? They are all needed, and must work together for the safe sailing of the ship—the sense of responsible ownership, the experience of the government, the devotion of Julius, and the prayers of Paul.

But to those who gather as Christian men and women in the House of God and the Harbour of the soul, the admonition of the apostle comes home with peculiar and even more intimate and commanding force. To the older among us the words of the apostle come as a reminder that we cannot run upon accumulated experience and inherited piety. God has done great things for us whereof we are glad. He has magnified His grace over against Salmone and been with us when we sailed under the lee of Crete. We were come with difficulty over against Cnidus ; but if we have not yet reached Rome, we are not without the comfort and rest of Fair Havens. But Christian found that the peace of the House Beautiful was but

a preparation for the fight with Apollyon ; and from Fair Havens Paul sailed into the teeth of Euroclydon. Let us not suppose that we have obtained our purpose yet. The snare of the south wind is never more soft and subtle in its scented and bewitching blowing than when it tempts an old Christian to loose the tackling of the soul, or to imagine that it is ever safe to take risks. You remember Dante's picture of the ship that has sailed safely all her voyage through, "wrecked in the harbour's mouth."

Nor must the younger of us suppose that we have obtained our purpose when we have joined the Church or made our resolves. These things are good, but they are only preliminaries. It is a great thing to have our sailing orders and know where we are bound for, but we have yet to make the voyage. There is really no more dangerous and insidious time than when the south wind blows softly, when all men speak well of us, and life is an affair of blue seas and clear skies. It is just then that we are tempted to suppose that we have obtained our life's purpose, and to be lulled into a fatal carelessness. The goodness of God should indeed lead us all to repentance, and "full purpose of, and endeavour after, new obedience." But over and over again it has been sadly true that the God who was sought and found in the stress of war and anxiety has been lost in the security and ease of peace. Supposing that we have obtained our purpose ; yes, but is our purpose one with the purpose of God ? "Come, thou south wind," is a prayer that we all make with the Shulamite ; but do we add, with her, "Blow upon my garden, that the spices thereof may flow out" ? Unless the goodness of God to us is

going to issue in blessing to other lives, then we will find in the end of the day that we have *not* obtained our purpose, and have done our utmost to thwart the purposes of God for us and all mankind. When the south wind blows softly, that is the time to be on our knees. It has nearly always meant trouble, in the experience both of nations and of individuals. Everything seemed to smile upon her, and Germany was quite sure that she had obtained her godless purpose from the 'seventies onward. She loosed from ancient ties and ideals of honour and uprightness, and knew not until it was too late that she was running straight into the wreck of Euroclydon. The shores of time are strewn with the wrecks of the south wind.

"Says Tweed to Till :
' What gars ye rin sae still ? '
Says Till to Tweed :
' Though ye rin with speed,
And I rin slaw,
For ae man that ye droon,
I droon twa.' "

God's north wind has been the saviour of many a soul. They have but wrapped the tighter about them the garment of salvation. When the north wind blew roughly they ran for shelter to a safety they had not sought before, and obtained something better than their original purpose. " You must take the wind in your face," says Samuel Rutherford, that old salt of the soul, " if you would fetch Christ."

And notice the reason that the mariners gave for disregarding the advice of St. Paul and taking such fearful risks. " Because the haven was not com-

modious to winter in, the more part advised to put to sea from thence." That is always the excuse that people give for breaking away from old and safe moorings. The place is too strait for them. They long for the open freedom of the sea, and to be getting on. The habits of their parents and their grandparents are too confining ; the outlook is too restricted. The religion of their fathers is too narrow. Let us risk it ; let us get out ; we can always run into some safe harbour if a storm does get up. Oh, the folly of it ! St. Paul could take risks as well as and as fearlessly as any man, but he knew that you might as well try to tame a tiger by stroking it as play with the unbound fury of Euroclydon. Better to winter in the narrow ways of Fair Havens than to run helpless before the gale with neither sun nor stars in many days appearing, and certain shipwreck ahead.

And sometimes people of more thoughtful temperament urge us to leave old moorings and make for the uncharted sea, because, they say, the shelter of revealed religion is not commodious for the soul of man to winter in. There is, they tell us, no room in the inn of Bethlehem for modern pilgrims, or in the old harbour of Fair Havens for the larger craft of mind and intellect that we build to-day. "Not commodious to winter in!" *Faith never is.* It never has been. There is always a native restlessness and dissatisfaction of the soul that craves for ampler shelter, and fuller knowledge, and quicker progress. But better a thousand times be incommoded than engulfed. Paul was as alive to the drawbacks and incommodiousness of the Fair Havens of religious doctrine as any man of his day. He had set sail from

port after port, because he could never find any presentation of religion big enough and secure enough to shelter his great soul, and let it ride freely. He had left Pharisaism, which had at one time promised to give him all he sought, and passed into the waters of Judaistic Christianity. But there he could not rest ; and the "Blue Peter" went up again, and he was off. He never all his days found any expression of religious conviction that would do justice to what he had found in Christ his Lord. "I count not myself to have apprehended," he confessed.

You will never find any creed, any presentation, any "last word" that is adequate. Fair Havens at the best is a half-way house, a makeshift on the way to the Eternal City. Faith at the best is a precarious harbour, open to the inrush of many contrary winds and the wash of heavy seas. But then that is just the nature of faith. Faith is an anchor, not a dry-dock. St. Paul and all the saints have been well aware that it was not commodious. But we must winter somewhere. Why not with St. Paul, in the promises of God and the love of Christ ? The commodiousness is in the Father's house, when at last we arrive

" where no storms come,
Where the green swell is in the haven dumb,
And out of the swing of the sea."

X

CHERISHING THE DREAM

GREAT as were the glories of David's reign, and magnificent as his actual achievements were, like many another dreamer of dreams he had to leave these shores of time without beholding the accomplishment of the greatest ambition of all. For years he had set his heart on building a worthy temple for the worship of God, on giving concrete expression and permanent beauty to that religious ideal which had sustained him through his long and adventurous life, and which had kept developing and unfolding before him until he had become one of the greatest exponents of God not only to his own people and his own age, but to all the world and to every age. David had actually thought and planned his temple all out, and looked forward to spending his last years in giving the great dream form and substance.

But it was not to be. At least David was not the man who was to do it. And for the strangest of reasons—because he was a man of war! Why, whose battles had he fought? Had his whole life not been one long campaign against God's enemies? Was it really to be counted against him that he had ever been the protagonist of right in the battles of the Lord? Well, that was the reason given. And I sometimes

think that we find herein but another instance of the Divine forgiveness in its completeness and its faithfulness to the promise that "your sins and your iniquities will I remember no more." For we know that there were other and, to our thinking, much more cogent reasons why David's hands were not clean enough to build the holy place. But there is no hint of all that in the Divine message. This is the reason given, that it would be better to leave the actual building of the Temple to the next generation, who would be able to bring cooler brains and maturer judgment and less feverish hands to the work. The hand that has wielded the sword, especially if it be the sword of the victor, is never steady enough to frame the terms of the Peace Treaty. These things will be better done by the next generation.

But in few of the events of his life does the essential greatness and nobility of David's character come out more strongly than in the spirit in which he took his great disappointment. He went on, just as eagerly and patiently, with his preparations for a scheme of which he was not to be the builder. He still lived just as faithfully and prayerfully for the plan he was never to see fulfilled. And at a great convention of his leading men he asks God, "in words that thrill one with the sheer idealism of them," that his people might ever keep the dream of the Temple in their hearts. The time is not yet, he said. You and I may never see the accomplishment of that upon which we have set our hearts. There are many difficulties in the way, and like sensible men we must bow to the necessities of the situation. But keep this hope before men's eyes. "Keep this for ever in the imagination of the thoughts

of the hearts of thy people." Cherish the dream. Hold fast to the ideal. Lay the foundations in faith, and one day the structure will rise in fact.

"Thou did'st well that it was in thine heart." Such was the Divine verdict upon David's life. It was as great a thing in the eyes of God to have been a "faithful failure" as to have cut off the head of Goliath. He was decorated with the order of the "Well done!" for something which he never did! One of Rudyard Kipling's fine poems pictures the hosts of Heaven rising up to greet "the dreamer whose dreams came true"; but here we have God Himself standing up on the battlements of Heaven and leading the cheers for the dreamer whose dream did not come true. David's whole career had been redeemed and ennobled just because he carried that great dream in his heart. The intention of his soul formed the basis of the final and Divine verdict on his life. For it was a big, big thing for David to have kept that altar-flame alight in the hearts of his people and in his own heart, even when it was burning his own fingers and scorching his own face.

"Thou did'st well that it was in thine heart." We are impressed on a first reading of that judgment with the amazing charity of the Divine verdict; and to that aspect of it we will return. But the more we dwell upon it the more we are struck with the soundness and the wisdom of it. There is a beatitude for those who hunger and thirst for the eternal springs as well as for those who drink thereof. As the hart pants for the water-brooks so do our souls thirst after something or other. There you have the secret of any life. To what do your thoughts naturally turn in moments of joy or

in times of sorrow ? We may never build that castle in Spain or that temple in Jerusalem, but will they find its plans among our papers when we pass from these scenes of time ? We all come far short of the glory of God, but the point is, Were there any traces of footsteps tending thither ? The set of any life is infinitely more significant than its setting. God judges every life not so much by its track as by its trend. It may be a long, long way to the goal, but the question is, Is your heart "right there"? Can you say that, even though great seas and spaces sunder you still from that perfection of which you dream and for which you long ? St. Peter had a hot, rough tongue : his language could not all have stood repeating, but he could look Christ right in the eyes and say, "Lord, thou knowest all things ; thou knowest that I love thee." He is our Judge,—He knows all things. Is He also Saviour,—knowing that we love Him ? It is not so hard to separate the sheep and the goats as some seem to imagine. The sheep know His voice, whether it calls in the tones of duty, or the prompting of love, or the command of authority, or in some low undertone of sorrow. The question is simply this, Does goodness make any kind of appeal to you ? Does your heart respond to any worthy stimulus ? Are you ever as carried away in a good cause as Herod was in a bad ? He was so taken with the bodily gymnastics of a dancing-girl that he had offered her half his kingdom before he realised what he was saying. Have you ever caught yourself feeling for your pocket-book when you heard, let us say, some address from a single-eyed and devoted missionary ? Have you ever even in one mad moment of imagination caught your-

self writing him out the biggest cheque you ever drew ? We may not be responsible for all our deeds, but we are certainly responsible for our dreams. Will the great Discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart say in the end of the day, “ It was well that it was in thine heart ” ?

All the things that have ever been done in the world have been the result of dreams. The day arrived when the Temple was an actual solid structure of stone and lime ; but it would never have been there if David had not built it first of all in his heart, and made it his prayer that God would keep it for ever in the imagination of the thoughts of his people. The same thing is true of all the great and worthy things that have been accomplished. You will not “ build Jerusalem in England’s green and pleasant land ” unless you have first built it in your thought and your song and your prayer. “ Behold, this aster of dreams cometh,” they said derisively of Joseph. But they had to acknowledge him later as their saviour when Pharaoh, king of Egypt, had made Joseph his master of works. “ When all the land of Egypt was famished, the people cried to Pharaoh for bread ; and Pharaoh said unto all the Egyptians, Go unto Joseph ; what he saith to you, do.” It was the dream that prepared for the drama. It was the great dreamer who became the great doer. The ideal State, a League of Nations, the perfect Church, the Kingdom of God established in this and all lands—not until these great dreams have been cherished in ardent hearts through long years can they be warmed into life and bring forth fruit. The time of waiting, during which nothing appears to be happening, is no more lost than is the hidden period

of the seed that slumbers in the ground or the forming life within the egg. "Every noble purpose tends to realise itself. Every high, pure hope, though it be baulked at present, presses out towards fulfilment, as if by a law of its being, if only men and women will keep it in the imagination of the thought of their hearts." Are these our secret dreams? Are they the things that hold our eyes and engage our thoughts and occupy our affections? Then it is well indeed.

But we are right in being impressed not only by the wisdom of the Divine judgment but also by its charity. To take the will for the deed is God's way. The broad way to destruction may be paved with good intentions, but there is all the difference between these cold blocks of intellectualism and the fervent longings of the heart that there is between the granite of Peterhead and the red, molten lava of Vesuvius. God did not say of David that it was well that he had it in mind to do something for the spiritual welfare of himself and his people, but that he did well in that it was in his heart. A thing, even a good thing, may slip out of your mind without your intending that it should; but if you have once taken anything into your heart no one but yourself can ever banish it thence. If a thing is only in your mind it is merely in a brain-cell, and may be lying there like a prisoner awaiting condemnation and possibly execution. But if a thing is really in your heart it is being momently pumped through every channel and passage of your being, permeating you through and through.

"Thou didst well," God said. There is more than charity here: there is comfort. God knows why many of our most dearly cherished longings did not come

to fruition. But they were not cherished in vain. They effected something.

“ All I could never be,
All men ignored in me,
That I was worth to God.”

We may not understand just where the worth comes in or how it makes its contribution to the general wealth of the spiritual world. But so it is. And it should make us a little less downcast when we survey the pathetically inadequate output of our years. Progress cannot always be measured by the number of miles covered. I remember on one of the smaller navigable rivers in Canada, proceeding farther and farther into the heart of that great country. Every turn of the paddle seemed to be taking us deeper into the understanding of the secrets of nature. There was a pleasurable thrill in proceeding under our own steam, so that adverse currents were successfully breasted, and as a result of our exertions we were every moment learning more and widening or extending our vision. Suddenly the vessel came to a dead stop. We had entered a lock on one of the difficult reaches of the river. The outlook was entirely changed. No longer was there the vista of long mountain ranges, of rolling forests. No longer the singing of birds and the sweet scents of the trees. We were shut in, iron gates behind and before ; clammy stones and dripping walls. The busy paddles had ceased revolving. We were no longer moving forward. But in our imprisonment we began to rise. We had been shut in in order that we might be lifted up. And at last the gates in front swung open, and the vessel burst forth from her imprisonment on a higher

level. We were really making the most vital progress of the day when we seemed to be most at a standstill. We were getting ready to resume our forward movement on higher levels when we were compelled to lie quiet. We were overcoming difficulties that not all our steam-power could have carried us through when we lay patient in our prison. There was working on our behalf all the skill and wisdom and foresight of the engineer who had foreordained these things for us.

The thing is just a parable of the common experiences in human life. It is mere childish ignorance to try and measure the amount of progress by the number of miles covered. We may be moving up when we are not evidently moving on. We may be doing more by the dream in our hearts than by the fussy labour of our hands. Our prayer may be more useful to God and man than our performance. The Temple which was built by David's son, the Temple which he himself longed to build, has long since crumbled away; but the 23rd Psalm is a temple of the spirit whence the soul of the singer goes no more out to all eternity. Was it not well that that was in his heart? There are few stories in the history of literature more pathetic than the tragedy of the building of Abbotsford. But in his weakness and his loss the great dreamer built for every one of us castles and palaces and shrines, so that for all time there shall never be any housing difficulties for the romantic and adventure-loving among us.

We are all the debtors of the biographer who has portrayed for us the life-story of perhaps the greatest figure of the Great War. Like the warrior king, that other soldier also carried the sanctuary in his heart. Sir George Arthur says of Lord Kitchener: "His life

was based on religion in the primary sense of the word—the binding himself up with God. It seemed as if the conflict between good and evil had been fought and decided at some early stage of existence.” Yes, it is ever well with those who carry great dreams in their heart. They do far greater things than they actually plan. There is no end to their influence. Neither the great soldier of Israel nor the great soldier of Britain lived to see the fulfilment of his dream. But they did well that it was in their heart ; and that which they did death was powerless to undo.

XI

CAPTAIN OR CALF?

“They made the calf.”

“Let us make a captain.”

THE PENTATEUCH.

“HUMANITY,” said General Smuts recently, speaking of the present position of affairs in the world, “has struck its tents and is once more on the march.” If that be so, we may and must believe that we or our descendants will sight the Promised Land one day. Meanwhile we have arrived at a place in the wilderness where the food is scarce, and the waters very bitter, and the voice of murmuring rises all around. It is a good time to take up again this travellers’ guide, this *vademecum* of the soul which has preserved for us the account of the experiences of a people passing under the eye and under the leadership of God, often though they were tempted to doubt it, passing from a state of things which, albeit it had many attractive features and pleasant memories to which the weary pilgrims looked back with something of fond regret, was nevertheless always thought of as “the house of bondage”; passing from that to a life which was going to present its own difficulties, but which was a new and a better state of things for all concerned.

In that period of transition you find two extremes of thought between which the mind of the volatile masses

kept swaying. There was the sense of exhilaration and new-found freedom which gave loud and undiscerning thanks that the old state of slavery and subjection was ended for evermore and lay far behind them. Amid an orgy of dancing and singing and feasting and general revel the voice of men and women could be heard shouting, "These be thy gods, O Israel, which brought thee up out of the land of Egypt."

But there were other times and other moods, either when the pursuing Egyptians were hot on their track, or when the necessities of life grew scant and unpalatable, or when the hardships of the way became too much for them, when a very different cry was heard in the camp of Israel. "Would God that we had died in the land of Egypt! . . . Were it not better for us to return into the land of Egypt?" The innate conservatism of the human spirit asserted itself. They readily recalled one feature and another of the old regime that was most desirable, and if a general vote of the people could have been taken at such times there would have been an overwhelming majority in favour of electing new leaders, men who would take them back to the old conditions, for they had had enough of the delusive promises and will-o'-the-wisp visions of sanguine and ambitious demagogues.

How easily people delude themselves and how blindly they sometimes follow the impulse of the moment or the speaker who happens to have caught their ear! At such times to what unutterable depth of infamy may the human spirit sink! How history may be flouted and God dishonoured! We have spoiled the Egyptians, is the one thought uppermost in their minds. We have overthrown a regime of tyranny.

See the golden rings and the fine raiment and the wealth which now is ours ! And then there follows the most hideous debauch of materialism and Godlessness.

“ These be thy gods, O Israel, which brought thee up out of slavery.” And in their mad senselessness they ascribe all their wealth and their prosperity and their better prospects of success in life to the golden calf, which they worship with such thoroughness of unholy abandon. All that Moses had done for them is forgotten. God is ousted from their thoughts and their obligations by the more immediate presence of the golden calf, which has both made them and been made by them.

Or again, when the golden calf has at last sucked the stamina out of them, when it too has passed in ignominy because it was not really able to give them their hearts’ desire, how equally God dishonouring is the panicky stampede to return to a state of things and conditions of life from which it was the will and mind of God to deliver His people. They all murmured against Moses and Aaron. Church and State are alike discredited in their eyes. First the cry was, Let us make the calf which brought us up out of the land of Egypt. Now it is, Let us make a captain, and let us return into Egypt. How equally foolish, unjust, and dishonouring to God ! Was not God their captain Had He not led them all those years by the hand of Moses and Aaron ? Yet here is an uttered threat of “ direct action ” which, had wiser counsels not prevailed, would have imperilled the freedom of humanity and the spiritual development of the whole race.

History repeats itself in great cycles in this respect

over and over again. You find the people of the French Revolution driven at last to a tragic act of emancipation, spoiling and overthrowing their oppressors and worshipping in their mad, new-found licence nothing save the crudest materialism. And but a very few years later they are crying aloud for their new-made captain, and allowing themselves to be dragged into the slavery of militarism at Napoleon's chariot-wheel. "Make us a captain—Make us a calf," such has been the alternating cry all through this weary pilgrimage and march since humanity struck its tents and set out on the great quest.

There never was a time when it was so fruitful, so necessary to read history, to take long views of things, as it is to-day. Bishop Lightfoot used to say that the best cordial for depressed spirits was a study of Church History. If you are choked and blinded by the dust that is being kicked up these days by the march of humanity, it is a great thing to get away for a time to some mountain-top from which you can get a wide and true view of the general trend of things and the lie of the whole land, and so to see that God's in the procession ; yea, that the guiding Pillar moves steadily on at the head of the clamorous, toiling, sweating multitude. You are bound to lose heart and hope, the outlook will have in it for you nothing but discouragement and despair, unless you can get the large view even for one brief moment. The heedless throng may be dancing madly round their golden calf, or they may be throwing up their bonnets for their newest-found captain. But it was not the achievements of wealth and modern materialism which wrought the initial deliverance. It was a great

spiritual impulse coming from Divine springs which has brought the race up out of the house of bondage. And the onward movement will never cease nor turn back for all the mistakes of human leaders or the impatience and distrust of the masses. This onward march is of God : humanity will never turn back again to the land of Egypt, the house of bondage. As God lives, and as you value the sanity of your soul and the peace of your mind, you must realise that neither the cry for Mammon nor the cry for Militarism is the *dernier cri* of the human heart. Neither Mammon nor Militarism can ultimately take the place of Messiah. Now the cry is, " Make us a calf," and now, " Make us a captain " ; but neither of them can for long silence the prayer, " Give us the Christ." *He* must reign till He hath put all His enemies under His feet.

And now, lest any one should be inclined to think that this is just engaging in a little religious whistling in order to keep our spirits up, let us look a little more closely at some aspects of the problem of the development of human thought as we are confronted with it to-day. Surely the sleepiest Rip Van Winkle among us is rubbing his eyes at last, wakened by the loud guns of war, and through half-awakened eyelids has even got a glimpse of the red flame of revolution. It is popularly supposed to be an uncomfortable time for all exponents of revealed religion. I cannot myself share these misgivings, although I am often exercised as to the best way of meeting the changed outlook. I cannot share the misgivings because all through her wonderful history the Church of Christ has displayed the most divine aptitude for reacting successfully to

every condition whatsoever in which she has found herself for the moment placed. For one thing, we have not been surprised on our watch. When the present century was still young, Marcus Dods wrote to a friend: "I do not envy those who have to fight the battle of Christianity in the twentieth century. Yes, perhaps I do, but it will be a stiff fight." Well, there's always exhilaration in a fight, at any rate.

In philosophy, politics, government, and religion there has been revolution. Nearly forty years ago Sir John Seeley, in a much-discussed book, demonstrated the tendency in philosophy, theology, metaphysics, and history to break away from the autocracy of authority and submission to great names. "It is a change of system in the intellectual world, by which much established doctrine is branded with the mark of spuriousness. . . . Authoritative treatises are consigned to oblivion, ancient controversies cease, the whole store of learning hived up in many capacious memories becomes worthless." We have seen this general trend from monarchy to republicanism growing in almost every department of human thought and activity. There seems to be no reverence for great names, scant respect for the most venerable institutions. Everything that has been dear and familiar in the life of man seems to-day to be in the melting-pot. This being so, it is not surprising that, since knowledge is one and human nature is one, religion should be suffering from the same ferment and revolt. A great storm in the Atlantic makes itself felt in every hidden bay and most sheltered creek of the Hebrides. It would seem again to-day as if there were no king in

Israel, every man is doing that which seems right in his own eyes.

If you listen closely you will notice that the prevailing cries to-day may be divided roughly into the two voices which were heard in the camp of Israel during their time of transition. There are the hot-heads who would melt down everything that is precious, cast it into the fire and see what comes out, and who are prepared to worship that haphazard monster as the very god of their deliverance. Religion ! What can it do ? they cry impatiently. Long ago it withdrew into a high and cloudy mountain. "As for this Moses, we know not what is become of him." They will soon enough learn what has become of him, when he comes down from the mount clothed with the thunder and wrath of Almighty God, carrying in his hands the broken and flouted moral law written afresh by the finger of God. And on the other hand there is the voice of a timid conservatism which shrinks from the unknown and the untried, and is persuaded that safety and well-being can be had only by a return to the *status quo* or something as nearly resembling it as possible. This voice became audible at a later stage in the history of the people of Israel, which is just what we would expect, for it is a maturer voice. The child is destructive ; he will pull the flower or the toy to pieces in wanton mischief just for the fun of it. To the crude mind it is so easy to throw everything into the melting-pot and start afresh. It is the voice of maturer age which exclaims, "Let us go back," as it realises that it has over-hastily parted with much whose value was not clearly discerned at the time.

But the point for us to notice is that neither of these

voices is the voice of faith. In our religious experience I think that most of us had outgrown the calf period when we presumed to worship the pleasure of the moment and the work of our own hands and the device of our own minds, if we worshipped at all. But we had reached the second stage of idolatry, and were prone to lean too much on the leadership of the great captains—Athanasius, or Knox, or Luther, or Calvin, or Chalmers. And no doubt we made too much of them and their systems, giving to them much of that devotion and homage and service which should have been kept for the living God alone, who reveals Himself in many ways. “Lead us back” was the unworthy cry of a timorous conservatism only too common in orthodox religious circles. To a great extent the Church has merited the accusations of timorousness and obstructionism which have been levelled against her in certain quarters. But how infinitely more ludicrous and terrible is the cry that is loudest to-day! “Make us a calf.” Of the two I would rather worship a worthy captain than a golden calf—the immature, bucolic, sucking symbol of bovine self-satisfaction and listlessness. After all, hero-worship is better than heifer-worship. The hero-worship in the war did nothing but good in its way. High chivalry was drawn forth when men found they could place unbounded confidence in certain of their fellow-men. What unutterable and humiliating bathos it is for the nation to turn from such a lofty and generous exercise of the spirit and give itself up unrestrictedly to the worship of fatted selfishness.

But neither of great names nor of golden calves may we say, “These be thy gods, O Israel.” Our

duty is not to try and restore the past, which was very far indeed from being the religious or moral or social ideal. To fear the future is to doubt and to deny God. There would be no satisfaction in going back even if it were possible. Salvation for the race lies in no captain, still less in any golden calf, but in Christ. "The shout of freedom," says Goethe, "rouses men to revolt; no sooner are they free than the cry is 'Whom shall we obey?'" This instinct to worship a deity of some kind is at once the danger and the hope of the race. Mankind *will* worship: what and whom shall it be? Human passion or divine purpose? The lowest of which it is capable or the highest?

The clamour for the calf and the clamour for the captain, the desire to taste new experiences and the longing to find rest in the old, are really complementary, and both find their answer and satisfaction in the following of Christ and the service of His plan for the world. The two points of view have seemed to be antagonistic all through the history of mankind. It is the old opposition of Hellenism and Hebraism, of the Renaissance and the Reformation. There is in the spirit of man a certain "free zest and relish of the world" which is not ineptly symbolised in the calf—the joyous, irresponsible abandon of youth. And there is found also a calm and chastened spirit which wears a sober livery, and moves about the great tasks of life as ever in the sight of watching and controlling captains. These have tended to drift into opposite and hostile camps. In one have been found the men of intellect and imagination, in the other the men of religion. Between the two there has always

been a deep-rooted distrust, and often open war. Yet at bottom the two movements are really one. The former was apt to take account only of intellectual and imaginative satisfaction ; the latter was ready to stake everything on moral and spiritual truth. The former saw in art and science and the natural leanings of the human spirit nothing but a quickening of the energies of man ; the latter turned with impatience from all that was not directly and manifestly the revelation of God. Neither sees more than half the truth. The one forgets that no human knowledge or activity is perfected till it has learnt to see all things in God. The other forgets that God is to be found in the outward world of nature and beauty no less than in the inward communion of the spirit. And both find their unity and their perfect expression in Christ. He is the young Bridegroom rejoicing with His friends in all the gladness of the world ; and He is the Man of Sorrows steadfastly setting His face to go to Jerusalem and the Cross. When one religion, one view of life, one social ideal is set up against another there begin controversies and embarrassments. "But when the principle of all religion is compared with the opposite principle, when the life inspired by admiration and devotion is compared with the life that begins and ends in mere acquisition, then there is no controversy at all among those whose opinions are valuable." When mankind is at last redeemed, and sees all things clearly, it is seen gathered in holy adoration and eternal thanksgiving, not about a calf of gold, but around a Lamb as it had been slain, symbol of the love that gives itself in service and in sacrifice for the redemption of all.

XII

THE RUSH FOR THE DOOR

“They wearied themselves to find the door.”—THE Book of GENESIS.

“What God shuts is opened no more,
Tho’ man weary himself to find the door.”

CHRISTINA ROSSETTI.

THERE is in the nineteenth chapter of Genesis a wild, tangled story of men and women who got their own way in life, who laughed at the warnings of nature and of grace alike, and who despised the need for taking due and reasonable precautions to guard the soul of them from the unceasing down-drag of circumstances. If you don’t quite know what to make of this turbulent fragment, if it is to you a weird, chaotic thing, that means that it is just *life*, with all its paradoxes and surprises and infinite possibilities of divinity and of damnation. The Bible does not contain salvation in the sense in which a box holds pills—to be swallowed whole in case of need. There used to be a kind of superstitious sanctity attaching to the possession of the “good Book” in the house, a kind of feeling that somehow its very presence “would ward off scaith.” The prudent householder kept one just as he would invest in an insurance policy, because you never could

tell ! It was a good thing to have upon the housewife's shelf, with the good old family remedies and recipes.

You must not look here for any trim, bandbox way of salvation—follow the directions and the miracle will result overnight. Yes, we have here the *way* of salvation, sure enough : but a way is a long thing, often a rough thing, sometimes a dark thing, and always calling for effort and determination on the part of him who comes to it. Or, to vary the figure, you have not here, ready-built, a house for your entrance. You are given the material, certainly, but you must make your own dug-out, dig your trench of safety in the sweat of your brow and under a sufficiently sobering sense of the wrath to come. It is not so much a house—and this is particularly true of the Old Testament—as a quarry, out of which you can hew building material. Here are great slabs of human history, chunks of experience, flung down before you in the rough, pages from the diaries of souls, that come floating down the long savanna of the ages. Here is the story of men for whom, somehow, through sin or hacking disaster, the whole bottom fell out of things, until their feet were down on the very slag and fire-bricks of hell. Here is the poor, pitiful, ragged creature that imagined he could get along without God—yourself, sir, standing at last a naked soul before the gaze of the universe. One blast of God's keen wind has blown the last shred of excuse and defence away. Brave, independent little soul, that thought you could go your own way and do just as you pleased, how does it feel to be standing there with the mocking laughter of the universe ringing you round ? Do you think the Christ whom you have flouted and scorned

all your mortal days will of His infinite mercy drop one fold of His great white robe around you for protection ? I wouldn't count on it. It "isn't done," for one thing ; and, for another, if there's anything that I fear, it is the at-last-awakened wrath of a patient man. Sinning against the light : trifling with conscience : fooling with an unexploded mine. You had better have slapped Christ on the cheek and spat in His blessed face.

And you have here, too, in this wonderful Book we call the Old Testament, the picture of souls struggling upward to the light, like swimmers disentangling the clinging seaweed and coming up to the kiss of the sun and the laughing foam. They nearly went under. There are some dark and ugly patches in their life-history ; but God had regard unto their earnest cry, and when they struggled upward they did not struggle in vain. One recalls one's own experience when learning to swim, how one ventured out of one's depth in foolhardiness ; the swift thought of despair and of the need to do something for life, *dear* life. And then, first the grip of a hand, and once again the comfort of the feel of solid rock under one's feet again. But one would never have felt the grip of that hand and its salvation, nor ever known again the friendly feel of the firm rock, unless one had summoned body, soul, and spirit in one saving moment of determination to do something towards working out one's own salvation.

Here, then, in this tale of the sin and sorrows of Sodom is a rough-cast fragment from life. You have ugly sensuality, the consequences also of what did not look like sin, but simply the soft and utterly selfish

choosing on the part of Lot of what promised to be a good thing and to hold out the prospect of an easy life. Here, also, is that strange blindness which seems to have fallen upon so large a part of mankind at the present day. Here also, that merciful Divine intervention by which a man is sometimes simply seized by a *force majeure* and pulled within the shelter of the doorway for safety, and kept almost in spite of himself from making a base compromise with sinners.

It is the picture of those men smitten with blindness, and fumbling for the door, that grips the imagination. It is so exactly the state of things as they are to-day. This restless swaying of the masses, wanting something that they have not got, and not quite knowing what they want ; this blindness to the things that matter most ; trace them back, and you find their roots every time in sin. The selfishness that thought only of dividends and never of duty ; the smug complacency that could sing about " those halls of Zion " and never wince at the thought of the slums of our cities—we are going to pay for it to-day. All through the community—and surely it is seen at its strangest and most terrible in the families whose parents were brought up in the fear of God—you find this appalling blindness, and this dangerous restlessness. It shows itself either in a sense of being shut in and a frantic determination to escape into the open somehow ; or else it shows itself in a surly, disgruntled sense of being shut out from certain privileges that others are enjoying, and a determination to get in and have a share by hook or crook. In either case the search is for a door. The age is wearying itself to find the door.

We all feel these days as if we were fighting against something. The menace of this blank wall is becoming alarming. There seems to be no way through. We have arrived at the end of a long and very trying journey. It is good just to know that we are safely in the terminus at last. But no one ever wants to wait in a station. The first notice you look for is "This way out." That is the word of deliverance for which people are waiting to-day. They want to get out into the open, free life of the country, or adventurous life of the town, according as their fancy directs. Demagogues and visionaries and theorists in plenty are shouting "Lo, here! Lo, there!" This, and this, or that, promises a way out for all, to peace and plenty. And blindly the mass swarms along, only to find a forbidding "No road this way." If there were only a door of some sort,—a closed door even, a door but a little way ajar! Oh, the fascination of an opening in what seemed only a blank wall! But there seems to be no door. What some are suggesting as a thoroughfare would mean nothing but the entire removal of all confining walls of law and order and restraint. Read the books of to-day, listen to the speeches, study the schemes put forward by would-be reformers,—what does it all amount to? Simply that mankind is wearying itself to find the door.

Look at that surging, disappointed mass of humanity struggling wearily to find the door, and think first of its *desperation*; then of its *determination*; and last of a *declaration* about the door.

i. There is nothing more haunting in the whole range of pagan literature than the cry of those who feel themselves left outside the door. No one

likes to be left on the door-mat. And this was what pagan philosophy had succeeded in doing for man. It had brought them to the door of a great and goodly palace, but had not the key to let them in. It had filled men's souls with a great unrest and longing, but was unable to satisfy it. "If only there were some sure word of God on which we could safely pass the storms of life," cried Plato. But the cry died unanswered on the wind.

And, apart from Christ, to-day the world still lies in darkness and despair. Hindu and Mohammedan papers in India have been pouring scorn on the "Christian War," bitter and deserved scorn. They have their opportunity. Are they seizing it? No. Because they cannot. They have no substitute for Christ. It is Christ or chaos, Christ or catastrophe.

And at home there is the same unrest and unsatisfied longing. This is an age of extraordinary and unparalleled freedom, freedom amounting to utter licence. You boast that you are the captain of your soul and master of your fate. Well, I challenge you. I ask you, How do you like it? What are you making of it? A straight answer,—Have you found peace? There is a hunger in the heart of the world to-day such as there has never been. Every one is disappointed. The vanquished in the Great War are bitterly disappointed, and the victors perhaps even more so. It is always *hunger* that prepares men for revolution. The world has become suddenly self-conscious, and awakened to find its soul empty. As Mr. Edward Shillito says: "Everywhere the same cry is lifted; in every rank of social life the same hunger is confessed. To know what one is seeking *we must know what all are seeking*. They

are seeking for something which can give worth to this life, whose brevity and mocking desires never were so clearly understood. It is *not for bread* they hunger most, *but for the word* which can give meaning and reality to their days.” “Man shall not live by *bread* . . . but by the *word*.”

It is surely something more than a coincidence that the twentieth-century writer should use the same expression as the pagan philosopher of antiquity to describe this paramount need of men—the cry for the Word that shall give meaning and reality to life. Is there such a Word?

2. Before answering the question, let us glance for a moment in the second place at the determination of the surging crowd at the door. It is almost a fearsome picture, that angry, bloodthirsty mob, maddened yet more by their blindness and uncertainty and vexation, groping with gaunt hands to find the latch of the door behind which Lot cowers. Some kind of compromise, base and impossible, suggests itself to the thoroughly terrified mind of Lot. “Agree with thine adversary quickly,” said our Lord, “whiles thou art in the way with him.” Come to some working agreement before his temper gets uglier and his mood grows more vindictive. We are coming to see that unless we all arrive at some satisfactory arrangement, there are bitter and disastrous times ahead of us.

And not only at home. A thoughtful writer in the East has shown the folly of our being content to think that a League of Nations comprising only the nations of Europe would guarantee the peace of the world. China is awakening. She has grasped the significance of the

“open door,” and is feeling for it. If Europe leaves her out of the reckoning, and she decides to come west, there may follow a war so terrible that we shall say, Would God it were only the little German War of 1914-1918! Her man-power is greater than all the armies of the Allies and all the armies of the enemy bunched together.

When political problems are considered in terms of mere expediencies and interests, they simply leave us groping in the dark like blind men, mistaking friend for foe and not knowing where we are. “To the upright there ariseth light in the darkness,” because they have only one interest. “There will be safety in the vision of the far horizon ; it will preserve the mind from the paralysis which comes from the sight of the battle between interests. ‘For his candle,’ to use the fine figure of James Lane Allen, ‘the statesman must take in exchange the lighthouse.’ ”

3. And this leads us to the remembrance of the only authoritative statement that was ever made to mankind who were wearying themselves in their blindness to find the door. “Oh, let us in, that we may find the light !” has been the age-long cry of humanity ; and it has not gone unanswered. Ancient and modern thinker alike, as we have seen, have cried, “Oh, that there were some sure word to guide us !” And *God has given His Word*, made flesh. He has literally given His *Parole*—“the word of a Gentleman of the most unimpeachable honesty,” as Livingstone found it in his sore need—that He won’t go out of this world that He has made, until He sees this business of redemption through.

“I am the Door.” It is a police regulation of the utmost stringency for the safety and protection of

life, that in every crowded place where men gather, the Exit shall be clearly advertised, in order that none need perish, and that disaster may be avoided if it be humanly possible. That is still the eternal urgency for the preaching of the Gospel, that men may know where to find the Door, the way of escape from fire and death. We are beginning to see to-day as never before that it is Christ or chaos, Christ or catastrophe. We must give the door to the people at home, and to the millions of the East. It simply isn't safe to have blind men wearying themselves to find the Door, when we can lead them to it. Christ stands for fulness of life—for both that freedom and that shelter for which the heart of man craves. "I am the door: by me if any man enter in, he shall be saved, and shall go in and go out, and shall find pasture." What is your trouble? Do you sigh for rest? You can enter in to it through Christ. Are you conscious of being cramped and confined? Do you want to have a *real* good time, with no aftermath of regret? You can go out into a fulness of life and liberty and enjoyment that you never knew before if you go out by the Door. Is it satisfaction and some return for all your toil you seek? Christ knows and sympathises. "He shall go in and go out, and shall find pasture." There is in Christ for the world not only safety but satisfaction. Only through Him can the world resolve its problems. If you cannot say, as the wisest and best have said, "Thou, O Christ, art all I want," can you not at least say, "Thou, O Christ, art something of what I want"?

There is something almost heart-breaking about the way in which the Allies have been able to conquer their enemies, and seem unable to conquer themselves.

It has been the universal chagrin of man all down the ages. It was the thought that came to the writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews as he brooded a little sadly over that almost seeming sarcastic word of the Psalmist, when he said of man, "Thou hast put all things under his feet." Ah, no, he said, it was the optimism of a poet. We see not yet all things put under him. But—in a flash consolation came with the thought—"we see Jesus"; and everything is under *Him*, and in *Him* the guarantee that one day man too will be on top.

For long years the country of Poland has lain ground down under the heel of the enemy who had forbidden everything to her—the language and faith of her fathers, observance of her ancestral customs, the heritage of her past, her national dress, her songs, her poets. What was it kept her soul and faith and hope alive? Paderewski has told us the secret in the burning words he spoke at the Chopin centenary. The secret was Chopin. "Chopin alone was not forbidden. And yet in him we still could find the living breath of all that was prohibited; he was able to give us back our coloured robes, our belts of woven gold, our sombre cloaks, our proud headgear, the noble clank of our swords, the glitter of our peasants' scythes, our graveyard crosses, our little wayside shrines; he gave all back to us, mingled with the prayers of broken hearts, the revolt of fettered souls, the pains of slavery, lost freedom's ache, the cursing of tyrants, and exultant songs of victory. . . ." Poland seemed to be waiting in vain the fulfilment of her dream and the answer to her prayer. But she had Chopin, and, even while the enemy was everywhere, in Chopin all was restored and all fulfilled.

And we, we see not yet all that we have dreamed of, and hoped for, all for which our heroes lived and died. But we have Christ, and in Him we have restored all that was lost, all the ache and passion that never found words till it flamed into expression at Calvary.

“ He gave all back to us,” and in Him all fondest dreams, all highest hopes, are true and have fulfilment, until the hour of liberty shall come.

O blind, O foolish heart, how long will you weary yourself to find the Door ?

XIII

SENSATION OR SACRIFICE ?

“ Cast thyself down.”

“ Come down from the cross.”

THERE is in this life a downward drag of circumstances a gravitation pull of evil, from which none of us will ever be free until we hear at last the heavenly summons, “ Come up hither.” He who smote in Man, for man, the foe, heard those voices all the way from the cradle to the grave, clamouring in His ears that He should come down. As these two verses remind us, He met that suggestion at the very outset of His career of redemption and He encountered it at the very end. He heard it on the pinnacle of the temple, in the moment when the spiritual side of Him was at its height ; and He heard it on the elevation of the cross, when the physical side most predominated. The greater the height to which a man has been lifted by the power of the spirit or by the will of men, the stronger the temptation to fall. At the first Jesus is faced with the temptation to cast Himself down from the temple ; and at the last He meets the enticement to descend from the cross. Neither the heights of sanctity nor the high places of pain are safe from sinful insinuations and suggestions, as perhaps

you have made discovery for yourself. The world and the power of evil still offer all manner of rewards, and hold out all kinds of promises, to the man who will come down. It was just because our Lord realised that it would be indeed a come-down that He so strenuously refused to listen to the alluring voices, leaving us an example. And why ?

The world loves sensations. What a stir it would have made if Jesus had appeared on the well-known pinnacle of the temple at Jerusalem while the courts below were thronged with multitudes of worshippers, and had suddenly floated down amongst them from that dizzy height, smiling and unhurt ! Had the prophet of old not said that the Lord would come suddenly to His temple ? How could prophecy be more spectacularly fulfilled ? All through His ministry did the religious leaders of the Jews not keep twitting Jesus on His apparent inability to give them a striking sign that would at once prove the truth of all His claims ? How easy and dramatic to settle the whole thing once and for all by a sensational advent to the temple courts ! And was there not Scripture for it ? Was it not all in the highest interests and to be done with the purest motives ?

Just suppose our Lord had yielded to the impulse. If He had cast Himself down from the pinnacle of the temple, not all the King's horses and all the King's men could have set Him up again. Jesus of Nazareth would have been a nine days' wonder instead of a nineteen centuries' worship. He would have been Jesus the Juggler instead of Jesus the Christ. He would have been the sensation of the world, but not its Saviour.

And still we are confronted with the temptation to make religion popular and salvation sensational; to be *outré*, and eccentric, and spectacular. Attract attention at all costs, says the voice of the tempter to-day. Play with the laws of God. Defy the laws of gravity and of gravitation. Go in for the exceptional, even if it be risky. Break new ground. Make the people stare and gape and talk. You will be in the hands of God—at any rate you will be in the mouths of men.

Back from that dizzy height as you value your soul's safety and the success of the message God has given you to bring! Let the world keep twitting the Church on its inability to hold the field against films and football, a world that still keeps asking for signs when what it needs is salvation. Back from the airy, scary, vertiginous heights to the plain, humdrum, beaten track which the feet of the chanting pilgrims have worn hard and straight! Consent to follow the Lord and Master of us all in the quiet paths of service and surrender, and you have successfully withstood the first voice that would have cast you down never to rise again.

But when you have passed the first ward you will come to the second, as Christ our Lord did before us. Youth with its glamour goes. The love of the sensational passes. The circus tricks are seen through, the spangled dresses look pathetically shabby out of the limelight. We seek for ourselves a quieter religion, a more reposeful spiritual experience. The desire for climbing on to the pinnacle of things has gone with the foolhardiness of youth. But now the danger is that our spiritual life should come to an untimely end,

not through a broken neck, but through fatty degeneration of the heart. And before we quite realise it we are "lifted up" once again, only this time not on a pinnacle of glory but on a cross of suffering. For some the suffering is physical, for some it is mental ; some taste both kinds of anguish.

And once again that insinuating voice is heard, "Come down, come down." What has religion to do with a cross of suffering ? Pain, anguish, sorrow, doubt, darkness, the sense of being forsaken by God,—these are the very last sensations, surely, that a son of God should ever know. So the thought came to our Lord. Why, the whole thing's at stake ! If you are really the Christ you had better come down out of that if you expect us or any one else ever to believe in you. If the temptation on the pinnacle of the temple was great, what shall we say of the temptation on the pinnacle of the cross ? To take the pain out of life and the sting out of sin, would that not be a sure way to the hearts of men ? But He who hung and suffered there was as though He heard them not.

Those voices were never more clamant than they are to-day. Never was there a time when the offence of the cross was more offensive. People will run sentimentally to-day to the manger in Bethlehem, but at Calvary they still "stand afar off beholding that sight." This is an age when everybody seems to be out for devices to save labour and eliminate pain, and they want a religion to match—a religion that is drenched with sentiment but absolutely dry of sacrifice. There never was an age that was so ready to be religious—on its own terms. They like Christ—"the Christ" they prefer to call Him now.

“ How sweet the name of Jesus sounds in a believer’s ear ! ”—H’m, sweet, perhaps, but a little sloppy. These people refer to God Almighty, too, as “ the All-Father,” which is perilously near all-nonsense. They offer Christ upon His cross, if He insists on staying there, not myrrh and vinegar, but a little lavender water. But if they could only get Him to come down off that cross ! A crown of thorns is such a nasty prickly thing ! A religion without suffering or sacrifice or service—how attractive it would be ! How specious the invitation to come down from the cross ! How far-seeing ! How worldly-wise ! It has been left to our age to launch those fancy and cross-less religions upon a world that is only too ready to embrace that kind of thing, the religions beloved of upholstered suburbia, but which somehow one can’t see going down into the slums with William Booth, or marching through the heart of Africa with David Livingstone.

You can always tell these rose-water religions by the place they give to the cross, or rather the place they refuse to give it. Said an adherent of one of them, on seeing a copy of Dr. Denney’s book, *The Death of Christ*, on my shelves, “ But *we* don’t believe the eternal Christ died.” A nasty rebuff for Paul of Tarsus ! “ Come down from that cross, and you can do anything you want with this generation, Thou Jesus of Nazareth,” they cry. Abolish pain and suffering, and we will believe in you.¹

What a ghastly travesty of truth ! You are still

¹ It is noteworthy that the Socialist hymnbook contains Matheson’s well-known hymn, “ O Love that will not let me go,” but with the last verse omitted.

offering the hungry soul a stone instead of bread, even if the stone you offer be a diamond. What has a pale, gossamer fantasy of make-believe to give a suffering and sinful world ? " We preach Christ crucified," and unless we are going to do that we had better go and tout for some harmless patent medicine. We preach One who did not say, " There is no such thing as pain," but " the cup *that my Father hath given me*, shall I not drink it ? " And He is present to-day with all sufferers everywhere, and with all who are not denying suffering but defying it. We preach a Saviour who did not pretend that life could be lived without pain and sorrow, but One who won through to the love behind the loss. We are joined in a believing fellowship, not with men who said, " It was good for me that I managed to dodge the blow," but who without one shred of affectation declare, " It was good for me that I was afflicted." And there are hundreds who will tell you that they have proved the truth of the assertion that " when God gives to us the clearest sight, He does not touch our eyes with love, but sorrow." " If thou be the Christ," they say, " stay on the cross."

And so it is well for the fortifying of our souls that we are permitted to celebrate the Holy Sacrament. There is a fine phrase of our old Scots Presbyterian ritual where, at the sacrament of the Lord's Supper, the elders are bidden to bring in, or to uncover " the elements." For the symbols of the two sacraments our Master chose things that were both simple and elemental, meeting the great fundamental needs of life and health. One of these was water, forming, as it does, the larger part of the human frame. For

purity and for the removal of thirst He gave us water.

And the elements of the other sacrament are bread and wine. And these as the staff of life meet a great, fundamental need of our nature, only they meet it, not through simplicity but through a wonderful complexity of suffering, resulting in something that sustains life. They are both emblems and evidences of things that have passed through a long process of suffering and so are able to keep those who partake of them in life. The *tribulum* was the threshing instrument which winnowed the corn and made it meet for bread. It was because the early Church first saw the precious grains of wheat literally passing through the process of "tribulation" that they came to transfer the name to the higher husbandry of human souls that are purified and made white under the falling blows of the flail of suffering. And the red, shed wine came through the wine-press, from fruit that had been crushed and bled that it might help others. Pale, broken bread ; red, poured-out wine ! Our Lord chose these to be the symbols of the sacrament of suffering. And that is why those esoteric, crossless religions are such a man-made impertinence. "The night in which He was betrayed, the Saviour of the world *took bread*"—not spice-cake or sugar-plums.

We all rejoice that the Gospel should be presented under attractive forms, and think that perhaps our fathers did a disservice to the cause of religion by insisting on the narrowness of the road that leadeth unto life, and persisting in the assertion that there was only the one entrance to the beloved

city. We appreciate the emancipation of those whose peculiar message to their day and generation it is that there are twelve gates leading into the city of God, and that they are to be found on all four sides of human experience. Yes, there are twelve gates, and every one of them is a pearl. But what is a pearl? A pearl is a glorified agony. It means a life hidden at the bottom of dark waters which transformed its pain into a pearl. Every approach to the city of the redeemed, where there is no more night, unless it prove in the end but a blind alley, is the result of a surrendered will, an accepted cross, a life somehow laid down.

“ I am the vine, ye are the branches,” said Jesus to the disciples who had just left that first Communion table. How is that vital union effected? You may tie the branch that is to be grafted on to the parent stem,—tie it with silken cords; but it will only wither and die. If there is to be vital, effective, permanent union, both vine and branch must be cut and bleeding, and so be pressed together; and they heal in union indissoluble. The Vine was gashed that day on Calvary, that bleeding, wounded branches might be united in and through their anguish with the life-giving Stem. It is through His wounds and ours that we are joined, and as they heal we are more closely united to Him, and His life flows through us, and the Husbandman is glorified.

XIV

THE CREDENTIALS OF A LEADER

IT is hard for a man to escape the knowledge of God if he has ever been in any kind of desert place. "If a man would learn to pray," so runs the Basque proverb, "let him go to sea." "The world is too much with us"; but when a man is snatched by circumstances away from the shelter of the multitude, if he has been forced to endure the companionship of his own soul in any of the wilderness experiences of life,—a prolonged illness, a devastating affair of conscience and remorse, a blighting sorrow,—the God whom he has tried to serve, or to ignore, or to dodge, becomes the greatest reality of the universe.

We are not at all surprised to read that Moses, with that murder on his conscience, got an overwhelming impression of the nearness of God when he found himself alone amid the great silent spaces of the desert. I have had a man come to me on the eve of an attack, and break, for I believe the first time in his life, the grim reserve which had puzzled so many of those who knew and admired him, with the confession of a story not at all dissimilar to that of Moses. There are times when there are worse friends than death; and the very next day

that man had speech with God beyond the flaming ramparts of this world, where "the work of life is tried by a juster Judge than here."

There is an impression abroad at present that we are living in an age when the Church of Christ is faced with greater difficulties than she has almost ever been called upon before to face in the whole of her history. However that may be, we have to set off against that the other consideration that, for better or worse, the facts of the spiritual life have come into the common speech of men. The old shyness is gone, and novelists and others no longer hesitate to preach, or to handle the things of religion. All this means an increased sense of reality in spiritual things. The mysterious dealings of God with the human soul are allowed to be, not the outcome of neurotic fancy, but the experience of mighty men of action. Thus, to take but the most recent example of what one means—striking evidence is forthcoming almost month by month, Sir Ernest Shackleton says in *South*, the book in which he relates his experiences while exploring at the region of the South Pole: "When I look back at those days I have no doubt that Providence guided us, not only across those snowfields, but across the storm-white sea that separates Elephant Island from our landing-place on South Georgia. I know that during that long and racking march of thirty-six hours over the unnamed mountains and glaciers of South Georgia it seemed to me often that we were four, not three. I said nothing to my companions on the point, but afterwards Worsley said to me, 'Boss, I had a curious feeling on the march that there was another person with us.' Crean con-

fessed to the same idea. One feels 'the dearth of human words, the roughness of mortal speech' in trying to describe things intangible, but a record of our journeys would be incomplete without a reference to a subject very near to our hearts."

The record of so many of our journeys is incomplete either because we are not big enough to speak quietly yet confidently about the subject that should lie nearest to our hearts, or else because we have lived such self-centred lives that our souls have got no adventures to relate. And what the silent spaces of the snows did for Shackleton the tropics of Africa did for Henry M. Stanley. "On all my expeditions," said Stanley, "prayer made me stronger, morally and mentally, than any of my non-praying companions. It did not blind my eyes, or dull my mind, or close my ears ; but, on the contrary, it gave me confidence. It did more ; it gave me joy and pride in my work, and lifted me hopefully over the one thousand five hundred miles of forest tracks, eager to face the day's perils and fatigues." At the South Polar regions, in the heart of Africa, or at "the backside of the desert" of Horeb, the explorer may or may not discover all that he set out to find, but he does find God, or rather, is found of God. A record of their journeys would be incomplete unless their log-book contained the entry of the discovery of the great I AM.

The story of how Moses made the discovery is simply and sublimely and most suggestively told us by the sacred writer. A man always writes stately prose when he is recounting in sincerity the great experiences of life, as Shackleton does in his reference to the Unseen Companion of their march. "Moses said, I will

now turn aside, and see this great sight. . . . And when the Lord saw that he turned aside to see, God called unto him." To him that hath shall be given. The revelation of God is vouchsafed to the man who has the interest to turn aside and see. All through the Book of the Revelation St. John keeps telling us that he beheld and saw. It is to the seeing eye and the inquiring mind and the reverent spirit that the revelation of all great and good things comes.

"Earth's crammed with heaven, and every common bush
Aflame with God. But only he who sees
Takes off his shoes."

And so to the shepherd-prince the great knowledge was vouchsafed, the discovery which alone gives worth and meaning and dignity and the power of endurance to life.

"'Tell them I AM,' Jehovah said
To Moses; while earth heard in dread
And, smitten to the heart,
At once above, beneath, around,
All nature, without voice or sound,
Replied, 'O Lord, Thou Art.'"

Very suggestive, too, is it to note the frame of mind in which Moses was when the revelation was made, and how that revelation exactly met the needs of his spirit. Moses had just realised that he would have to play a foremost part in the greatest work of reconstruction and leading and shaping of a people that had ever fallen to the lot of any statesman; and his heart failed, and his courage seemed to ooze away. "And Moses said unto God, Who am I, that I should go unto

Pharaoh, and that I should bring forth the children of Israel out of Egypt? . . . And God said unto Moses, I AM THAT I AM: and he said, Thus shalt thou say unto the children of Israel, I AM hath sent me unto you." That is always the way; the human question, "Am I?" is met by the divine response, "I AM." Moses, conscious of unfitness, queries, "Am I?" The question echoes back from the Horeb of God, "I AM."

And grace is added to grace when a man has once seen his life-work and taken it up in the name and in the faith of God. "And He said, Certainly I will be with thee; and this shall be a token unto thee, that I have sent thee: When thou hast brought forth the people out of Egypt, ye shall serve God upon this mountain." What do you think of that for a token?

When his work was well under way he would have the assurance that he had done the right thing! Isn't that just the kind of token that God gives a man still? He has no written and definite guarantee that God will prosper him in the work he has taken in hand. But experience corroborates the ventures of faith. Moses will have the joy and satisfaction one day of gathering the people whom he has redeemed under the shadow of this very mountain where the presence of God was first so strongly and inspiringly felt by him. Not to-day or to-morrow may you see the fruit of your faith. We have just got to believe that we are doing the thing that God would have us do. But afterwards you will see it all in a flash. When the child you have trained, or the members of the class you have taught, or the friends from whom you have never hid the secret of your successful journeyings across the wilderness,

come too in their experience to the shadow of Horeb, and bow in silent awe before the God of life's great desert spaces, you will receive your token that God led you to help them, and was with you in this all through. Experience will corroborate the venture of faith.

But it was one thing for Moses to feel the sublime consciousness of God in those great desert spaces where no sound was heard save the quiet cropping of the sheep as they nibbled the sparse clumps of herbage, or the thunder rolling round the head of Horeb. There everything seemed to proclaim God. Everything seemed to chant "I AM." When, however, he went from the quiet of the desert to the duty of deliverance, what was he to say to the people whose future welfare lay so largely in his keeping ? And God gave Moses his message. He bade His servant just go and tell men what he had learned for himself. "Tell them I AM." That was to be his passport and credential. And armed with that sublime message, Moses went to his life-work.

One might well hesitate to handle this verse because of its sheer sublimity. Two words ! Three letters ! And *we* need Thirty-nine Articles, and thirty-three chapters of a Confession, and Fourteen Points, and I know not what all. And a precious lot of good they have all done us ! "Tell them, I AM." The truth is, we have been telling people far too much that it wasn't really necessary for them to hear ; often things that were not vital truths of our own religious experience, and failing to emphasise the few things it was all-important they should hear and believe. This generation needs more than anything else to have

restored to it the consciousness of God and the sense of responsibility to God. That is the message, that is the one credential and passport to the leadership of the age and the delivering men out of the house of spiritual, moral, or social bondage. With a curious, and yet perhaps rather human lack of confidence in the sufficiency of the sublime credential which God had given him, Moses urged God to confer some further and more spectacular power upon him. And God gave him, as He sometimes does, in concession to human importunity and weakness, and in order that His servant might come for himself to realise what were the real sources of power and influence over his fellows, certain rather unedifying powers, such as that of turning his rod into a serpent. It must have grieved the heart of God to have to stoop so from the sublime almost to the ridiculous. And you remember what happened. Moses went to his great task, and the first thing that he did was to try the serpent-trick. But it wasn't the serpent in his hand but the sympathy in his heart that really won the confidence and love of the people he had come to save and help. Moses had a very human streak in him, just like the rest of us ; and he made a point of trying on the serpent business the very first occasion that offered. But these exhibitions, which seemed to the Egyptians to be merely clever conjuring tricks which Moses had learnt as a boy from the court magicians, did no good at all. It simply got the other man's back up. "Then Pharaoh also called the wise men and the sorcerers : now the magicians of Egypt, they also did in like manner with their enchantments. For they cast down every man his rod, and they became serpents.

And it hardened Pharaoh's heart, that he hearkened not unto them ; as the Lord had said." The Bible is a very frank book ; and it tells at once that God didn't get much glory, or Moses and Aaron much satisfaction, or the children of Israel much deliverance, out of that rather puerile contest of sleight-of-hand.

If you have the means at your disposal you can do a certain number of tricks with the expectation that you will impress and gain over the multitude. You can put the price of coal up one month as if by the inexorable necessity of the law of supply and demand, and make it come tumbling down ten shillings a few months later. And what is the result ? It just gets the other man's back up ; and he swears that he and his friends will show you a trick worth two of that.

But there was one part of Moses's equipment which Pharaoh could neither counterfeit nor defeat. It was that great loving heart of the man who was set on the betterment of his people ; of the man who had dedicated his life to the social, moral, and spiritual redemption of his brethren. The forces of evil and opposition could not in the end prevail against a spirit like that. And still less could they either counterfeit or defeat the message which Moses brought. There was no moral value or permanent worth about the turning of his rod into a serpent. But the man who turned a nation of cringing slaves into the very people of God remains for all time one of the greatest miracle workers humanity has ever known. And he did it through the great message he brought them : I AM THAT I AM.

In the work of reconstruction and deliverance which

lies before us three forces will be tried. There will be the tricks of the clever conjurers who imagine that power and influence consist in the ability to play upon the bump of wonder, and to demonstrate in spectacular fashion the possession of political legerdemain. It is a dangerous and, at the best, a doubtful game. Playing with serpents has been the bane of humanity from the time of the Garden of Eden and the court of Pharaoh right on to our own day.

The wiser heads will be quick to realise that the way to leadership is to display a heart that really sympathises for the sufferings of those who are in bondage, and is determined to find a way out in spite of the seeming insuperable opposition. But even they will find that the real talisman is that through which Moses wrought the great deliverance for the people under his care. Clever head and burning heart—he possessed them both. But we see to-day that it was neither wriggling serpent nor wrestling love which found the passage through the Red Sea and the long wilderness. Moses would never have been able to accomplish what he did unless he had been able to tell them, “I AM.”

Would you be one of the deliverers and helpers of your day and generation? Tell them of the great conviction that came over you as you faced your awful desert-silence. Tell them of the Unseen Companion of whose presence you became aware as you plodded through the cold ice and trackless snows. “A record of our journeys would be incomplete without a reference to a subject very near to our hearts.” Go to people careless in giddy pleasure or sick with sin, and tell them just what you have yourself found.

That is the message for which the hearts of men are hungering. That is the word that the world most needs to-day. "Say to them, I AM" And you won't have to say it twice. When a man is alone with the glories of a sunset-flaming bush, like sweetest music there steals through his frame the great assurance, "I AM." When he is sitting in the waste places of his utter grief, and the death of love at his side has made all life a desert, like a bell there tolls the great "I AM." And when he has made a howling wilderness for himself through sin, and he crouches crushed in the hot sand, like the crack of doom conscience and remorse chant in dreary monotone, "I AM." Tell them that. Tell it to the young ere it be too late. Tell it to others while yet the day of grace lingers. Take a turn up and down every week in the 139th Psalm: "Whither shall I go from thy spirit? or whither shall I flee from thy presence? If I ascend up into heaven, thou art there: if I make my bed in hell, behold, thou art there." It is a fearful thing to approach Horeb on the windward side. Say to the careless and the thoughtless, God is. Ring it through the madness of Vanity Fair: sound it through the depths of Everyman's despair: proclaim it on the Gospel trumpet to the farthest ramparts of the world: I AM. Whatever else may seem transitory or unreal in experience, there is one sure and inescapable fact—the fact of God. I AM. He is not only the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, the God of our fathers, as Moses found. He is our God. The man who loves, knows it. The man who sorrows, discovers it. The man who sins, will find it true.

And let the timelessness of this great word establish

and strengthen your soul. What is man that thou shouldest fear him ? What is the life of the greatest tyrant that ever wielded the authority of a little day, but the bursting of a bubble ? I AM,—the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever. You have, on a railway journey, felt your eyes dazzled by the swift rushing past of multifarious objects,—telegraph poles and bridges, houses and hedges. And suddenly some vast and steadfast mountain peak, far out beyond the dazzling dance of things rushing so bewilderingly past you, has caught and held your eye, giving it rest and peace. And while all else seemed sooner or later to fly for ever by, like some steadfast companion, that great mountain has suffered no change, unmovable and yet seeming to march with you all the time. “ I will lift up mine eyes unto the hills, from whence cometh my help.”

Such is the journey of life. With rushing speed all things go flying by us, some seeming to linger on our near horizon a little longer than others ; yet they too at length drift into the dim gone-by. Only one object seems to suffer no change, and yet it moves with us as we move,—Horeb, the mountain of God. Yesterday, and to-day, and for ever. No speed can ever carry you past Him. In days of health and in the hour of sickness ; in times of joy and in seasons of sorrow ; in youth and manhood and age ; to the end and in the end, I AM.

XV

THE DANGER OF LOOKING BACK

IN a home that I knew very well it was the custom at family worship to read the chapter verse about, going round the whole room, the head of the house, children, visitors, maids, and men all taking part. The broken English of some continental savant might be followed by the cultured tones of an Anglican prelate, to be followed in course by the homely Doric of north or west country or the lisping of the child just learning to spell, whose first unaided reading of a complete verse was duly chronicled in the margin of the big family Bible, with the date. One remembers, as a child, in particular, the subdued excitement as to who would get the short 32nd verse when the chapter being read was the 17th of St. Luke's Gospel. "Remember Lot's wife." The grim, gaunt text seemed to stand up in the green fields and pleasant flowers of our Lord's discourse like the weird original in the midst of the plains of Sodom. And every time one passed by it again there seemed to be greater and greater depths of sinister significance about the warning of this petrified woman. He who had loved so, throbbed so with fulness of life, given in especial to woman, an honour which the world had never dreamt of according to her before, seems to have shuddered at the thought

of all womanly grace and virtue shrivelled to a brackish column of salt,—horrible monument of a moment's hesitation when the voices of love and duty and honour and salvation were calling. To Him who had watched the lowly Maid of Nazareth with warm heart and glowing eye and busy hand helping to form for Him His wonderful ideal of womanhood, there was something awful in the contemplation of this wife of Lot. And something of His awe seems to hang about the whispered aside of our text, as if, amongst all the ghastly spectres that affright our souls, the greatest and most horrible is a woman whose heart is turned to dust, and who stands for ever looking back when she should be leading the generations on.

Our Lord saw in the incident from old Hebrew history a living lesson for His own Church ; and there is no less need of the warning to-day than there ever was. That pillar of salty deadness has never melted from our midst, and it perpetually tends to form in every community and in every life. We know very well that persons of an undue conservatism, who insist on looking back and telling us that the former times were better than these, do tend to turn into mere pillars of salt —columns of bitterness. Refusing to look forward they soon become unable to move with the moving times and change with the changing conditions. They would rather go back to Egypt with all its servitude and bitterness than march forward to any promised land. The old state of affairs is “ in a lowe ” behind them, and others, accepting the changed social conditions are hastening forward with what speed they can, to make the best of it in a little city of refuge where they will reorganise and start afresh on better lines, please

God ; but these others are like Prince Charlie after the tragic throw of Drumossie Moor, and unless some firm and friendly hand seizes their bridle reins, worse things will befall them yet. Salt is good and useful in its place, but a little of it goes a long way. Especially, said Jesus, must Christians have " the rapture of the forward view." Our line is not a prudent conservatism but a holy boldness.

There is a wonderful spirit stirring in our midst these days which is proving itself by many tokens to be none other than the eternal Spirit of God bequeathed by Christ to His Church for her guidance, and never wholly absent from the world of forward-looking men. I was talking lately with a well-known member of the great Jewish community, and he told me how the same Spirit is stirring in their synagogues and circles. They too are experiencing the same quite healthy revolt on the part of the younger generation from a dead and barren orthodoxy. They too have suffered in the past from the heavy hand of the ecclesiastic, and are looking to some among their sanctified laymen to give them a lead in spiritual renewal ; and not a few of their rabbis are responding to the call, so that the old Bush is burning again, here and there, with something of the old-time fire which first made Moses the man of God take off his shoes and worship at the sight. My friend spoke of what he knows, coming as he does from one of the great Jewish families and the heart of one of the most successful of their proverbially successful commercial undertakings, coming as he does also fresh from experiences on active service. And my heart leaped up as he spoke of the growing need that serious men in Judaism are feeling, for the erecting of mighty spiritual barriers to

withstand the awful flood of materialism that is threatening not only the soul but the very life of all of us. And when I asked him where we were to find those barriers, he replied : " Where but in the old books which we read in our synagogues and you in your churches, and in the spirit of truth and righteousness and the fear of God which they begat in the men of old ? " " You believe then," I said, " that the guiding Pillar still goes before us, leading us on into new revelations of the eternal truth of God ? " " Most certainly I do," was his reply ; " and it is our only hope." And we found that we shared the conviction that the present revolt is only a revolt from outworn forms and unattractive services. " Yes," I said ; " there was a co-religionist of yours called Paul of Tarsus who said that ' the letter killeth, but the spirit giveth life.' "

There is a wonderful awakening going on all over the world, showing itself at times in unlooked-for ways and appearing often in the most unlikely and unexpected places. The great thing for us is to be believers in that Spirit and to be His allies. Jesus said that he would send this Spirit to *lead* His people into all truth. Leading is a gradual process ; it means moving from one theological and social camping-ground to another. The one thing that can never happen if we are really following the living and leading Spirit is that we should ever stand still in idleness or contentment or religious stagnation. Our guide is not a pillar of salt, stationary, backward-looking, and dead. It is a Pillar ever moving forward to new and better things through constant change. Sometimes that Pillar seems to our holden eyes like a great mass of cloud, dark, obscure, and hid-

ing much from our eager gaze. Sometimes it takes the form of a consuming fire, a conflagration in which things are burned up—but not the things that really matter. But it is always a very Pillar of the guidance of God, glowing, living, moving, contagious. It means that if only we have the faith to follow we shall be led on to better things—a truer theology, a more vital religion, a nobler state, a better social future and a worthier people to inhabit it, on to a city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God.

Bishop Andrewes was preaching on one occasion before Queen Elizabeth, and took Lot's story as his theme. “There are in Lot's storie,” he said, “two very notable monuments of God's judgment, the *Lake of Sodome* and *Lot's Wife's Pillar*. The one, the punishment of *resolute sinne*; the other of *faint virtue*.” There are many who escape from the slough of resolute sin who fall into the snare of irresolute virtue. And they consequently play a losing game all along. They set out to make their way to something better, but they keep looking back, and so know neither the sweets of sin nor the safety of the saints. All the good they seem to be in the world is to be permanent warnings of how not to do it. “He who is in the field, let him not turn back. (Remember Lot's wife.) Any man who makes it his object to keep his own life safe will lose it.” Which seems to mean that once having heard the far voices calling, and being out in the field, you had better keep moving. Many a tale there is of men trying to dodge falling shells who would have consulted their safety better by just keeping going on. Lot's wife had set out and had escaped so far; her pillar stood many good furlongs from the destroyed city

But the passers-by never thought of her as one who had had the foresight and the courage to come out, but as the member of the party who looked back. It was her irresolute virtue which the after-ages remembered, not the initial wisdom of her setting forth. And what people have tired of to-day, and what God tires of, is the type of virtue that has set out with such high promise and then got petrified. A Church that is stagnant, a theology that is stereotyped, a religion that has its face turned backward, is the kind of thing that living men simply pass by. A pillar like that can support no superstructure.

There are many persons of "faint virtue" who will gladly admit that God led His Church safely onward up to a certain undefined point in history. Certainly He was manifest in the days of the apostles and of the early Church. Not hesitatingly will such persons admit that they can trace the working of the Holy Spirit in the times of the Fathers, of Luther and of Knox. He was present also, they find, in the Covenanting days, with Rutherford and Melville and Henderson. These were great days ; and as they think of them they sing with more than Old Testament fervour,

" O God, what time thou didst go forth
Before thy people's face ;
And when through the great wilderness
Thy glorious marching was."

But since then the glorious marching has degenerated into a feeble and hesitating limp along, with crutch and bandage, torn banners and quenched music. Or they may strain a point, these backward-looking faint-hearts and admit that God was with His Church

in the days of the Disruption in Scotland. But evidently Chalmers was the last who had speech with Him and witnessed His great goings in the sanctuary and throughout the land ; and we are left to infer that at some not quite clearly defined moment in the reign of Queen Victoria, God Almighty resigned the government of the universe and left things to chance. Poor God !

Blasphemy ! Sheer and utter blasphemy ! If this were a day for heresy hunts there would be a long row of salt and crusty pillars of the Church arraigned at the bar of the General Assembly. The thanks of his grateful country were once accorded to a Roman Consul because in a dark hour in her fortunes he had not despaired of the Republic. Has it come to this, that we have actually to thank those who have not despaired of the Church of Christ ? Oh, for one hour of Paul of Tarsus ! “ A great door and effectual is opened unto me, *and* there are many adversaries.” The faint-hearts would say with a sigh, “ *but* there are many adversaries.” Not so St. Paul. To his mind the adversaries constituted the open door. The challenge was the chance. The opposition was the opportunity. To chaos he brought Christ.

“ Remember Lot’s wife.” Remember what happened to irresolute virtue at a moment when everything depended upon looking and moving forward unhaunting and unresting. If God has brought you out in your experience into any wide and airy place, do not turn back again into the stuffy little house you left. Let him that is in the field not turn back. Remember Lot’s wife. Life is movement under the eye and the leadership of God. If they are trying to tie you up

in some narrow little house of orthodoxy when God has brought you out into His wide open field, don't let them. Life is movement. Life is what we are alive to. To be alive only to money and the main chance and number one, is to be petrifying already into one more warning pillar. Life is love and beauty and sonship with God. "It is not what the hand grasps but what the eye sees and the heart feels that makes life great." O God, are there not enough warning pillars, rigid through cramp of the soul, "stiff with money," or starched with pride, or hardened in selfishness and unbelief?

Do you remember the song that was sung by the poor girl, "with her heart of song and her frail reed of life, who died so young among the mountains of Donegal"? She pictures in *The Passing of the Gael* those who had been driven forth from the rough but dear hill-places of home to make a living in a strange land far across the sea. They had succeeded beyond the dreams of avarice, and were now wealthy and great. But she knew how little they were really to be envied. And with eyes made sharp by approaching death she addresses the poor folk who had elected to remain in the old country, and speaks of those who had gone:

"The whip of hunger scourged them from the glens and quiet moors,
But there's a hunger of the heart that plenty never cures;
And they shall pine to walk again the rough road that is yours."

It is ever to those who "walk and are sad"—not more because they are sad than because they are still walking—that Jesus Himself draws near and goes with them. The one thing the Church and nation cannot do is to live on its past, just as the one thing

which the individual soul cannot do, and keep its spiritual health and vitality, is to live on an inherited religion. During the great Coal Strike some years ago the country was living for a time on the stored-up supplies in the great yards and bings and railway depots. It seemed all right for a day or two. But the inevitable result was a gradual slowing down of the industries and activities of the whole country. Such is the danger of living on an accumulated piety. Inevitably there comes a slackening off, a fatal slowing down. And you remember how, when the miners got to work again, the country seemed to leap forward into exhilaration and life and joy. So must we keep digging deeper and ever deeper into the "unsearchable riches," quarrying our own spiritual fuel, feeding the furnaces with fresh supplies.

And if there are any to whom these words about "the unsearchable riches of Christ" fall like a foreign tongue upon the ear, may I say this? You have at least God's priceless boon of a good and honest heart. Well, the great thing, the secret of salvation which Lot's wife forfeited, is to keep moving. You may not yet have travelled far from doubt and unbelief. The city of refuge for which you have begged may be a very little one, and still a long way off. But if you are not yet encrusted with indifference and self-satisfaction, the road is open. You know what is the Zoar you have set before yourself through the grace and the mercy of God,—the little city that you hope to reach that your soul may live. It may be only the doing of the next duty that lies before you; it may be merely the determination strenuously to keep an open mind and a willing spirit. Well, in God's name and as you

value your soul's eternal salvation, do the thing that you have set before yourself. For to you also, as to Lot, the angel of God says, " See, I have accepted thee concerning the city of which thou hast spoken. Haste thee, escape thither ; for I cannot do anything till thou be come thither." Have you grasped that—that even with all His mercy and might, God Himself cannot do anything for the salvation of a man's soul until he has himself done the thing that he knows he ought to do ?

And when you have done it, I promise you that you will have the same experience as Lot had. The sun will rise upon you also when you enter into Zoar.

XVI

THE SIGHTING OF CYPRUS

“When we had come in sight of Cyprus, we left it on the left hand.”

“We sailed under Cyprus, because the winds were contrary.”—
THE ACTS OF THE APOSTLES.

THERE is more in these words than meets the eye. They have to do not only with the sailing of a ship, but are entries in indelible ink in the log-book of a soul. There is more than the salt of the sea in them : they have a certain bitterness of tears, and a sigh in them that moans with more than the persistence of September winds that vex the Mediterranean blue. If you would understand these words you must picture a man prematurely grey, bent with a life of unusually hard toil, and bearing the marks of both mental and physical suffering—picture him leaning over the gunwale, thinking long, long thoughts as the vessel skirts the island of memories. And, like the mountains of Cyprus rising out of the mists that catch the eye of the great traveller, so do thoughts arise in his mind of what was and of what might have been. Barnabas, that big mountain of a man ; the mists of darkness that enveloped the sorcerer,

Elymas ; Sergius Paulus, the straight Roman pro-consul who had discovered that he had a soul ; those wonderful days of missionary activity and of the right hand of the Most High. And then sharp words, misunderstandings, a cleavage in an old friendship that ran deep and dividing, and never again a repetition of those Cyprus days together. Yes, he had been too hasty that day in the matter of young John Mark, forgetting that blood was thicker than water, and that Barnabas, who had been big enough to trust Saul the persecutor when no other man would go near him, would surely want to give his own nephew another chance to make good. And not even Paul's magnificent *amende honorable* in his letter—his last letter, to Timothy—could ever restore the past. A glimpse, two glimpses of Cyprus from the sea, as he came and as he went for the last time, but never again a night in the home of his old friend and comrade. “The winds were contrary.” What had been done could never be undone. “The contention was so sharp between them, that they parted asunder one from the other, and Barnabas took Mark with him, and sailed away unto Cyprus.” Away unto Cyprus ! Out of Paul’s life altogether so far as we know. And no ship in which he sailed again ever touched at the island, although it sometimes seemed as if one might. But “when we had come in sight of Cyprus,” says Paul’s friend and biographer, and the companion of his later travels, “we left it on the left hand.” Did St. Luke know all that was passing in his friend’s mind as he gazed in silence at the water breaking on the island shore, while the familiar landscape slid by ? And did he guess of the heartache that

was beyond the cure of his medicines, beloved and skilful physician as he was ?

i. One's first reflection on that pathetic figure straining his eyes to catch a fleeting glimpse of the fast retreating island is of the tragedy of it. So near, and yet so far ! To sail twice under the lee of Cyprus, and yet because of contrary winds or because of pressure of other things—" we left it on the left hand, and sailed into Syria, and landed at Tyre : for there the ship was to unlade her burden"—to be unable to land, and seek out the old comrade, and shake him by the hand, and make it up again before the last long voyage of all ! Our acts, our passions, our hasty words, they do so much more than we ever imagine at the time that they will do. We do not mean the thing to be final and irrevocable. But circumstances prove too much for us, and we are swept out by forces too strong for us to issues of which we never dreamt. Not all the goodwill in the world, not all the regret and prayers of even an apostle, can avail against those contrary winds. Because we have been once to Cyprus we think we can surely touch there again some day, and renew the old fellowship ; and that everything will be all right. And somehow, as the years drift on, it becomes no easier to make the landing, and offer the hand of friendship, and seek forgiveness. The pressure of business keeps two lives apart, and circumstances seem to accentuate the difference, until Cyprus which once was a shining memory becomes a mist-girt island of regret, drifting farther and farther from us as the leagues of salt unfriendly ocean multiply and intervene. " A man should keep his friendships in

repair," said Samuel Johnson. And it is worth doing a good deal to prevent another from sailing off with a broken heart and an injured spirit into Cyprus. For life has a way of getting lonely, and there are no friends like the old friends; and it is a bitter experience to pass from the isle of youth and memory under a lee shore.

Or the poignant tragedy of it may go deeper still, as in the case of one who leaves on the left, not a human friendship, but the Divine, sailing off from those bright shores of promise almost as soon as they have been sighted. "When we had discovered Cyprus, we left it on the left hand." The unlading of the ship at Tyre, the claims of business, or just the adventurous call of the sea singing in the ears of youth, prove too much for so many, until it is too late, and contrary winds make any landing on Cyprus impossible. And so it remains just an island in the sea of life, unattached and unrelated, that early contact with the Divine—a shining memory and an unredeemed promise. To have God come over the bright horizon, and to sail on and pass Him by; to spend one's days in trafficking with Tyre, and never to have known the higher commerce, is there any tragedy like that? And yet is it not too often the history of generous young lives that have had the benefit of a godly upbringing? Cyprus can never be to them a name devoid of tender and gracious memories; but somehow they shy off from closer contact with religious experience. They are not found taking the place that it was hoped they would take in the higher life of the community. They have discovered Cyprus only to leave it on the left hand.

They have been "almost persuaded" but never actually cast anchor. And the full tragedy of the situation, which has long ago been apparent to others, only dawns gradually on such a one himself when, a prisoner in chains, borne along at the mercy of uncontrollable winds, he is passing to his last port of call, and dimly he discerns those hills of Cyprus to which once he lifted eager and expectant eyes. Is there then any tragedy like the tragedy of the discovery that life has given nothing comparable to that which we have allowed it to take from us? The traffic of Tyre can be purchased at too great a cost. O dim, dear Island of God, hail and farewell!

"What peaceful hours I once enjoyed!
How sweet their memory still!
But they have left an aching void
The world can never fill."

2. Or from the tragedy of those so seemingly casual words of the sacred historian, we may turn to the thought of the trial involved. The ceding of Cyprus became a question of practical politics in the history of our nation during the Great War. For the obtaining of a desirable object, embracing the greater good of a common cause, it was actually proposed to part with the island whose history has in its later years been part and parcel of our own. So do there come times in the life of all of us when we are confronted with the question of the cession of something which has valuable privileges and wealth of sentimental interest which no figures can tabulate, in order that a larger gain may accrue, not necessarily to ourselves, but certainly to others.

There is a suggestion of this in the restrained language of the historian of St. Paul's travels, when twice over he mentions the fact that Cyprus came upon his horizon, only to fade away again. The apostle might, by a little less solicitude for the affairs of the kingdom of God, have accomplished his heart's desire. He could have arranged to make a special visit to Cyprus, and gratified a personal longing at the expense of a larger labour. But the constraint of Christ had a mightier grip of him than the claims of natural inclination or even of human friendship. The time was short and the need was great. Barnabas and Mark were there to give the Gospel to Cyprus. He alone could carry it to Rome and send it on its triumphant course to Spain and the western lands and our own dim northern isle. And, fortunately for us, the cry of the needy lands that lay in darkness sounded louder than the clamour of his own imperious self-interests.

But who shall measure the depth of Paul's disappointment as for the second time—and he must have known well it was probably the last time—he realised that Cyprus was not going to fit into his mission? Once again in lesser things as in greater—and sometimes it seems harder to make the sacrifice in the one than in the other—he had to sacrifice self to service, desire to duty. There was a kind of cruel aggravation of the disappointment that Paul should have come in sight of Cyprus, that he should have seen once again the familiar landmarks, and perhaps the very house of Barnabas. "When we had come in sight of Cyprus, we left it." "The little more, and how much it is! The little less, and what worlds away!"

“ For saints in life-long exile yearn to touch
Warm human hands, and commune face to face ;
But these we know not ever met again :
Yet once St. Paul at distance overmuch
Just sighted Cyprus ; and once more in vain
Neared it and passed ;—not there his landing-place.”

Here, too, the apostle sails very near the experience of many a one. So often, if we are to enter into life at all effectively, we have sooner or later to submit to some amputation of the natural affections and inclinations, some limitation of our just ambitions and obvious qualifications. We must choose between our comfort and our cause, between Bethany and Calvary, between Cyprus and Rome. And then blessed is the man who can “ turn his soul’s necessity to glorious gain,” who sees not the loss to himself so much as the advantage to the cause he serves, who is saved from self-pity by a vision of the great thing he is helping to bring to pass.

A soldier of France lay on a hospital-bed. His shattered arm had just been taken away. The surgeon looked down with pity at the white young face. “ I’m sorry, my boy, you had to lose your arm,” he said. The eyes of the lad flashed. “ No, no, doctor. I didn’t lose it,” he said, “ I *gave* it—to France.” His head sank back on his pillow, and he whispered, “ *My France.*”

“ I would have you know, brethren,” wrote the apostle to his friends at Philippi, “ that the things which happened unto me have fallen out rather unto the furtherance of the gospel.” And that knowledge made it less hard to leave Cyprus on the left hand, and all that Cyprus stood for.

“ Who order’d, that their longing’s fire
Should be, as soon as kindled, cool’d ?
Who renders vain their deep desire ?—
A God, a God their severance ruled !
And bade betwixt their shores to be
The unplumb’d, salt, estranging sea.”

“ When we had discovered Cyprus, we left it.” But
“ so we came to Rome.”

3. And when we have got so far we have already realised not so much the tragedy of those seemingly artless words of St. Luke, nor what they suggest of trial, as just the sheer triumph of them. Sometimes even in our own short and circumscribed experience we are permitted to understand why no landing was allowed at Cyprus. “ They assayed to go into Bithynia,” writes St. Paul’s biographer, of another occasion when he and his companion at that time found themselves foiled in another desire. “ They assayed to go into Bithynia ; and the Spirit of Jesus suffered them not.” It probably seemed little enough like the resistance of the Holy Spirit at the time. It probably looked far more like a chain of most untoward and exasperating circumstances. It was only afterwards, when the door into Europe opened so surprisingly and so memorably, that the missionaries realised that it was the Spirit, and were glad that the little postern into Bithynia had been closed to them.

The evacuation of Gallipoli was only less of a feat of determination and courage than its heroic occupation. To have come in sight of Cyprus and to have sailed resolutely on was a thing big enough for the sacred historian to record twice over. “ When we had come in sight of Cyprus, we left it.” That is not the

kind of detail that a secular writer would consider worth recording. And yet it is a most significant entry in the log-book of the soul. The things that are sighted in the voyage of life are sometimes of infinitely greater importance than the things that are achieved. To have taken a brief bearing by the hills of Cyprus may be a far more important incident in the voyage than to have unladed in the port of Tyre.

And so our business is to help people to realise God. It will be a great service to the community if we can all contrive to make the public worship of His house the glorious and heart-stirring action which it ought to be, and once was. “Whether they will listen to our talking matters very little, and sometimes it is better that they should not ; but it does matter that they should not go through life missing the highest moments that are possible to the human spirit, and never tasting the new life of fellowship in adoration.”

Believe that it is a big thing to have sighted Cyprus, even though contrary winds and adverse currents sweep you past it. Have an unquenchable faith in the reality of the vision that has been vouchsafed to you, and in the infinite importance of your peculiar and individual contribution to the things that make for righteousness. So shall you do more than you will ever know in this life to strengthen the faith of others and to make the Church of Christ what she was meant to be, “the place where those who march with God can find their point of rallying.” And so even the very failures and disappointments of life—“the things which happened unto you”—will, in the providence of God, fall out unto the furtherance of the gospel.

XVII

MEMORY AND MORNING

I REMEMBER the morning I landed at Jaffa to begin a camping expedition through the Holy Land, being met by a well-known London preacher who held up his hand and said, "Oh, go away back ; you will be so disappointed!" Such was not my verdict, although I understood afterwards what my friend had meant. In a land which was at that time oppressed by the Turk, where most of the sacred sites were matters of discussion and many of them scenes of dispute, there was much that was calculated to disappoint one who wished to travel quietly in the sacred footsteps. But the great, broad outlines are still there. You get the atmosphere of the East, so essential to an understanding of much of the Bible. The mountains are still round about Jerusalem, and it is still possible to look upon the features of the landscape which were the last objects to hold the eyes of the Saviour of the world ere the great darkness came down. But it was a very little thing which first stirred me mightily in the sacred city, partly because it was unexpected. I was meditating quietly in my room after a first look round Jerusalem, when suddenly the silence was pierced by the shrill crowing of a cock, and, like Peter, I found the floodgates of memory opened.

There are not many cities in the heart of which you may suddenly hear the crowing of a cock—I do not remember to have heard it in any other city in the world, and to hear that unexpected sound in such surroundings is an experience not readily forgotten. Our Lord knew very well what He was doing when He linked a saving memory for his erratic disciple with the familiar farmyard noise. There is many a lad in our great cities, fresh from a highland home and the prayers of his mother, who, standing in imminent and awful temptation, could be saved were he to hear once again on the heavy night air the calls of the old farm-yard or the lowing of homeward driven cattle—in such mysterious ways does God move to the succour of His children. It was all that, and more, that Peter heard that night when he went out into the porch from the heat of the high priest's fire. The bird of dawning woke within him long, long thoughts of the highland home in Galilee. Once again he heard water lapping against a boat on a northern lakeside. Once more he heard a voice that called, and called again, like some zephyr cooling the heat of his passion and his pride Peter remembered. And the torrent of oaths was stopped, and saving tears flowed in their stead.

“He went out into the porch ; and the cock crew.” The man was running away from his post, turning his back not only on Christ, but also on his own manhood, when the shrill clarion rang out like a Roman bugle-call. Against the people of the porch—the sitters on fences—the bird of dawn cries aloud their shame. That is the conviction which in one form and another has gripped the mind of men of any insight and imagination. “A wee bird cam’ to oor ha’ door.” Wee birds

have a way of coming when men are tempted to desert an ancient loyalty under the fear that it is going to prove a lost cause. It is the same kind of idea that Rimsky-Korsakoff works out in his whimsical way when he makes a *Golden Cock* utter its repeated warnings to king and people. Does salvation depend on things like that ? Yes, on strangely little things, that do not seem so small when we look back on them. A letter, a missed train, a chance call, a book picked up in an idle moment, an accepted invitation of a friend to accompany him to evening service in the house of God—things like that have been the cock-crows heralding the dawn of a new day.

I sometimes wonder if Peter recalled that evening when the impudent young minxes teased him out of the high priest's palace and he sought the porch. I wonder if he recalled it that other night when another maid, called Rhoda, encountered him in a porch again when he was trying to get in, and kept him waiting without in his hour of need. Then once again his highland brogue betrayed him, but on this occasion to his friends. And Peter realised afresh the danger of those who wait in porches.

“ He went out into the porch ; and the cock crew.” The strange sound of salvation came just at the moment when he needed it most. Then he was tasting the dregs of experience. Life had failed ; he himself certainly had failed ; even Christ seemed to have failed. There he goes, turning away out from the conflict of emotion, from the toils of passion, rage, disappointment, and the sting of memory—into the porch, the threshold of another kind of life and possibly a suicide like Judas's. And then the bird of dawning spoke, heralding the

breaking of a new day—a new day for Peter, an endless day for the world.

The Christian imagination has never done justice to that cock-crow, just as none of us ever does justice to the great moments of life and experience. Shakespeare gives some hint of the power of it :

“ It was about to speak, when the cock crew.
And then it started like a guilty thing
Upon a fearful summons. I have heard,
The cock, that is the trumpet to the morn,
Doth with his lofty and shrill-sounding throat
Awake the god of day, and at his warning
The extravagant and erring spirit hies
To his confine.”

There comes a moment to most of us when life, or our enterprise, or even the Christ of God Himself, seems to have failed tragically and completely. There comes the impulse to turn our back on the past for ever. The desire uppermost is to get away from it all, out into the friendly and concealing night. How gladly would one be a doorkeeper just to have the chance of a word with the man who has come out into the porch, and stands at the parting of the ways ! Where will your porch lead to ? What will the day that is breaking see ?

The peril of the porch may overtake a man at any stage of his experience. Come it early or come it late, it means that he is edging away from Christ and responsibility and witness-bearing. It means that the spirit of the world has grown desperately strong. It means that that quixotic Nazarene can’t count on you for the defence. It is a dangerous hour, for if it means nothing more, it means at least a weakening of those

winsome chivalries of boyhood that would have died for a dream's sake.

Well, there is this to be said to the man in the porch. Others have been there before you, ready to step out into the night, and they have heard the cock crow. John Bunyan has a very frank passage in his *Grace Abounding* for which many men in the porch have blessed him. He tells how he was beset by all manner of the crudest forms of doubt and unbelief. "These blasphemous thoughts were such as stirred up questions in me against the very being of God. and of His only-beloved Son : as whether there were, in truth, a God or Christ ? And whether the holy scriptures were not rather a fable, and cunning story, than the holy and pure word of God ? " Then he goes on to enumerate and detail other forms of doubt which assailed him, and how he endeavoured to "set some of the sentences of blessed Paul against them," but all in vain. "These suggestions (with many others which at this time I may not, and dare not utter, neither by word nor pen), did make such a seizure upon my spirit, and did so overweight my heart both with their number, continuance, and fiery force, that I felt as if there were nothing else but these from morning to night within me : and also concluded that God had, in very wrath to my soul, given me up to them, to be carried away with them, as with a mighty whirlwind."

Now what did he do ? He just looked his bogey right in the face. He turned the telescope of a little clear and fearless thinking on that bewitching Lorelei. "Only, by the distaste that they gave unto my spirit, *I felt that there was something in me that refused to*

embrace them." The bird of dawning is already singing a man's salvation when, however fierce the temptations by which he is assailed, he admits that there is a saving something in him that refuses to embrace them. You are not alone in your doubts and your fierce temptations. The dawn has broken for many a man just in realising that simple fact. But whatever you do, don't linger in the porch. Don't nurse your doubts or pander to your passions. Open the window. Get out into life. A wound is a dangerous, maybe a loathsome thing, but a scar is an honourable badge. This is what the great writers of all ages have done for us. They have not hidden their scars. "This is the great gift of those who speak to us with the word of power, that they reach down to us their wise and kindly hands and lift us up to their serene height. Battered they may have been themselves in the storm ; children of tempest they must be in some measure. But they have outlasted the fight, and, however brief-lived they be, have lived long enough to bequeath to us who follow, their heritage of courage, wisdom, humility, and rich toleration."

These helping hands are being stretched to-day from all quarters. If you think John Bunyan too old-fashioned, you can listen to a modern soldier and explorer like Sir Francis Younghusband, who wrote a book called *Mutual Influence* which he sub-titles "A Review of Religion." In it he begins by affirming : "Most men, and particularly men of action, are deeply conscious of the presence of some Unseen Power at work in the world. . . . And what they have felt has filled them with the conviction that the Power makes for goodness ; they have wished, therefore,

to work with it and have it working with them for what they are convinced must assuredly win in the end."

Or listen to Mr. Horace Hutchinson, the well-known author and sportsman, telling how he came "From Doubt to Faith." He tells how he was for many years of his life—until past middle age—an agnostic. That is a long time for any man to remain in the porch. He speaks wistfully of the coldness and loneliness of that position. "Surely if there is one who deserves all pity it is the agnostic, and surely the agnostic feels very keenly how pitiful is his own case, denied the possibility of the Great Companionship, in comparison with any who have the assurance of a divine help on whose strength they may rest." And then he goes on to relate very simply how he became a convinced Christian, "taking religion very seriously, as the one thing that mattered."

These are times when the air is simply vocal with the cock-crows that hail the dawning of a new day. None need stand shivering in the porch. I think we have heard quite enough about the religious difficulties of the present day. As Dr. Denney used to say in his pungent manner, "There is really only one religious difficulty—the difficulty of being religious." To those who protest that they are finding the Church of to-day unattractive and ignorant and narrow and dogmatic, the words of that balanced thinker J. S. Mill are worth recalling: "If all were to desert the Church who put a large and liberal construction on its terms of communion, or who would wish to see those terms widened, the national provision for religious teaching and worship would be left utterly to those who take the

narrowest, the most literal, and purely textual view of the formalities. Therefore, if it were not an impertinence in me to tender advice in such a matter, I should say, let all who conscientiously can remain in the Church. A Church is far more easily improved from within than from without."

A woman once told Huxley that, as she did not believe the Athanasian Creed, she had got up and left church when the minister began to read it. "Now, Mr. Huxley, don't you think I was quite right to mark my disapproval?" "My dear lady," said Huxley, "I should as soon think of rising and leaving your table because I disapproved of one of the entrées."

Do not cease to call yourself by the great name of Christian. Come and give us the help of your advice and the support of your sympathy. You may not relish all the dishes, but there will always be something for dinner. Beware only of the man who tries to explain everything to you. Beware of the man who insists on having everything explained.

"I know not how—I care not why,
To this one faith I ever hold,
Something there is too great to die,
In scarlet poppies 'mid the gold."

You will deny, said Jesus to His too-confident disciple. But He promised him that he would hear the bird of dawning crow. And when a man hears that, he cannot linger in the porch. You remember how in *Hamlet* the Ghost, which to Marcellus and Horatio is but a vision of nameless and unmeaning terror, fades on the crowing of the cock.

“ Some say that ever 'gainst that season comes
Wherein our Saviour's birth is celebrated,
The bird of dawning singeth all night long :
And then, they say, no spirit dare stir abroad,
The nights are wholesome, then no planets strike,
So hallowed and so gracious is the time.
So have I heard and do in part believe it.”

They believe it altogether who have found their ghostly misgivings vanish with the voices that call them back to faith and hope and service. “ And the cock crew. And Peter remembered.” God's bird awakening memory was also ushering in the dawn of the day of the world's redemption. And sometimes still, when the porch has been cold and the night dark, and the temptation strong to deny all knowledge of the soul's sublimest moments, a casual voice avails to waken memory. A man remembers some saving word of Jesus ; and, lo, 'tis redemption and the dawn. “ Watch therefore : for ye know not when the master of the house cometh, whether at even, or at midnight, or at cock-crow.”

XVIII

JEREMIAH'S BET

" And I bought the field that was in Anathoth of Hanamel mine uncle's son, and weighed him the money, even seventeen shekels of silver."

I SOMETIMES think that it was not only because of the wonderful spiritual preparation of the Jew that his land and his people were chosen for the supreme revelation of the Godhead, but also that his proverbial instinct for a bargain, his amazing success when it comes to a matter in which speculation must inevitably play a part, may well have had something to do with it. From Abraham, setting out on his great venture of faith, leaving everything and risking everything, gambling at a later stage in his career—gambling with God for the souls in Sodom, and losing because his generous heart had made him set too high a figure on the possibility of righteousness in that abandoned city ; from Abraham right on to those reckless fishermen, letting nets and gear all go by the board when the Man from Nazareth cried up another market that bright morning, the history of the heroes of the Jewish spiritual campaign has been that of men—and women too—who won out in the end because of their keen speculative instinct and because they were not afraid to take a long chance.

Religion has suffered too much and too long in later days because of the strangely perverted notion that had got about that it was a peculiarly unattractive case of "Safety first." From birth, which is the first adventure, right on to death, which is the greatest of all, life consists in taking chances, running risks, and ever venturing out upon something which is less than knowledge. "We walk by faith, not by sight," is not only the rule of the pilgrims' road ; it is the condition of to-morrow's engagement and next week's promise. Buying and selling, planning, promoting, undertaking, —is there indeed anything we do which is not the child of faith ?

It would be strange then, if to creatures such as we, who, not finding enough spice of uncertainty and adventure in the fare of life, are constantly creating for ourselves fresh circumstances of speculation, whether in our games or in our businesses—it would be strange indeed if this element of speculation were lacking from the greatest game and business of all, the winning of our soul's salvation. And the question comes to be for us all, as one has aptly said, "not whether we are going to live by faith, for we are all doing that already, but just what sort of faith we are going to live by." Donald Hankey has put the attitude of the religious man to the adventure of life in a memorable phrase when he says that "True religion is betting one's life that there is a God." Betting one's life. That is to say, renouncing some of what are commonly supposed to be the prizes of life, as Moses did when he let the treasures of Egypt go because he had his eye on a still bigger thing in the shape of a deferred bonus. Betting one's life, as men have done who

have turned from the inducements of a brilliant career at home that they might serve God and the kingdom of Christ in foreign lands ; or as men did in the fields of France and Flanders while shirkers grew rich in material goods behind the shelter of their bodies.

That was the meaning of Jeremiah's bet with his cousin Hanamel. It is an interesting and suggestive story. The prophet was in prison through the machinations of his enemies. To him there came Hanamel, the son of Shallum, his uncle, offering to sell him a piece of land in Anathoth, the family's native place on the outskirts of Jerusalem. The object of Hanamel's visit is obvious. The men of Anathoth, and particularly the prophet's own family, were bitterly opposed to him. Jeremiah had espoused what was at the time an unpopular cause, and in particular, he had aroused the unbelief and recriminations of his enemies by his confident prediction that the investing armies of the Chaldeans would soon melt away and Jerusalem be free from the siege of the invader. "At that time the land about Jerusalem must have been practically worthless. It was at the peril of his life a man went into the fields to till them, and the harvests that might ripen there were sure to be reaped by the Chaldean soldiery, wandering round. On the other hand, money was of great value. Prices were high, and the means of living difficult to secure. Hanamel seems to have conceived the idea of playing on the simplicity of his cousin, by offering him the purchase of some family lands. If he declined, his predictions of the future, and, indeed, his prophetic character, would be discredited ; if he accepted, Hanamel would make a good bargain, and enjoy a

hearty laugh at his cousin's expense. So men act who, in the imagined superiority of their worldly wisdom, are mere fools compared to the babes whom God makes wise. The offer was accepted, and the transfer of the lands carried through."

So Hanamel went his way, and Jeremiah was left with his bad bargain. He had bet on his faith in God. He had put money on it. He realised that faith is an investment, just as every investment is more or less an act of faith. But he was no more free from misgivings after the deed was done than are any of the rest of us ; and the chapter furnishes an interesting study of the prayer of a soul that is haunted with an uneasy misgiving that after all he has put his money in the wrong security. But none heard that cry of weakness save Him into whose ear it was poured. What the world saw, and what God finally vindicated in the sight of all men, was that magnificent act of faith. With a kind of legitimate pride the record of that big act of faith rings out : " Then I knew that this was the word of the Lord. And I bought the field that was in Anathoth of Hanamel mine uncle's son, and weighed him the money, even seventeen shekels of silver." That was that.

No man can be dead sure of God beforehand. Religion is a big venture, but seeing a man has got to take risks anyway, it is worth while betting on the love of God in Christ. If you ask for definite guarantees you are simply betraying an unhealthy and unsportsmanlike craving which is gratified in no other venture of life's experience. The Holy Spirit loves a man who will take a sporting chance just as truly as you would love him yourself. A French mystic has said

that to define God is to finish Him—"Le Dieu defini est le Dieu fini." No one can make bets after the result of the event has been revealed. Jeremiah made no mistake as to what he was doing. He knew quite well that the land he was buying would fetch no price in the market just then. "No speculative builder in Jerusalem would have looked at Hanamel's offer. . . . It was the religious interest that was supreme in the prophet's mind. The piece of ground was small; but it stood for all that was most sacred in his own spiritual experience. Had he withdrawn from Hanamel's offer, he would have confessed himself to be as unbelieving as the great majority around him. In buying the field at Anathoth he was redeeming his own faith in the future and in God." It may look like midsummer madness to maintain that what is to-day in the grip of the enemies of God will one day become the possession of our Lord and of His Christ. But that is just what faith does. It is not easy to withstand the constant pressure of the common opinion around us. When everybody keeps saying by deed if not in word, "Ugh! what's the use?" it calls for something more than native dourness to hold on to our conviction. "We are all too ready to yield to what we call the spirit of the age, or to the trend of modern thought, or to the pressure of actual circumstance. Little by little faith is elbowed out, till we speak and think and act as if there were no God. In spite of ourselves we become atheists. For we are bound to lose a faith that we never put in use; and, if we will not risk a five-pound note for God, it is in vain that we speak of resting on Him our hope of everlasting salvation."

Livy tells us how, when Rome was invested by Hannibal, the ground on which the Carthaginian camp stood was sold at its full price in the Roman Forum. The parallel to Jeremiah's act of financial faith is striking. Yet at that time Rome was sound to the core and believed in her own future; in Jeremiah's day Jerusalem was rotten, and believed in nothing. Jeremiah had at least £2, 6s. 9d. worth of faith in God, taking the silver shekel as equal to 2s. 9d., with of course a much higher purchasing price than that sum to-day. And there were some whose faith in God was revived when they found the prophet was so sure of Him.

"Faith is the title-deed of things hoped for," is one of the papyrus renderings of a well-known verse which has had abundant and unforgettable illustration in modern history over and over again. "We saw you going, but knew you would come back," were the words in which the sore-tried inhabitants of Mons greeted the returning British soldiers in the hour of victory. Over and over again some sneering Hanamel has held the fortunes of the Faith cheap. And ever there has been some Jeremiah, who from the depth of his own prison has taken the scorner at his word and gladly paid the price of his unquenchable faith. "Well, what about the prospects of foreign missions now?" his jeering captors asked of Adoniram Judson when he lay chained in a foul Burmese prison. "They are just as bright as the promises of God," was his swift and unhesitating response. The stock of the Kingdom of God unlimited is always safe to be held for a rise. There will always be investors even when the bottom seems

knocked out of the market. They weigh out the seventeen precious shekels amid the laughter of an incredulous world. But they are like the man of our Lord's parable who, having caught a glimpse of gleaming gold where perchance the rains had washed away the soil, revealing the presence of unsuspected hidden treasure, went away and sought out the owner and offered him a fabulous sum for his field. And the ridiculous sum was eagerly accepted, the owner wondering at the lucky chance which had sent a madman to him with more money than brains. But he laughs longest who laughs last. And furnished with a spade from the Carpenter's shop at Nazareth he digs his field, gradually bringing to light all the treasure hidden there, till at last his wild plunge is justified in the sight of all.

Are you prepared to bet your life that Christ is right? Are you convinced that those strange intuitions of the spirit are indeed "the master-light of all our seeing"? Some one has told how driving across the Yorkshire moors some years ago she was puzzled by the sight of paving-stones in unexpected places. How came they there? A moor is about the last place in the world where one would expect to find paving-stones. "Gradually they became more frequent, were laid closer together, till before long the remains of an old flagged pathway was shown, unmistakably, leading over the heather. Could such a pathway end in a *cul-de-sac*? Surely no one would have taken the trouble to plant those carefully transported stones in orderly succession on those lonely uplands out of caprice, or without an earnest purpose as a guide? These old transplanted paving-stones

on the Yorkshire moors still bear their silent witness to a deep yearning of the human spirit. Following their guidance, in days long ago, pilgrims were led to Whitby Abbey, uplifted on its stately headland above the Northern sea. Now, centuries later, scattered over hill and dale, signs of that old pathway are still visible. The moors left behind, it runs by the side of the modern high road, lonely, a little apart, yet clear and unmistakable in purpose. Stones from it are often missing ; here and there are gaps where the flagged pathway is lost or can be but dimly discerned. Yet, once seized of its idea and meaning, once possessed of the clue, the eye seeks for the missing stones and discovers them in unexpected places. They have been taken and built in to form part of a boundary wall. They have become the threshold of a cottage, or the lower step of a stile, but no odd modern uses can obliterate their ancient purpose. To the seeking eye they still preserve, safe and surely, the promise of the Central Shrine."

Such has been the kind of history and experience of the great spiritual truths which have paved the way for the race in their pilgrimage. Some of them have become built into the lowly fabric of everyday life, serving purposes that sometimes seem far enough from their original purpose. Many of them are adapted and transformed so that it is not always easy to recognise where they came from. But honest free-thinkers and those who hold aloof from the fellowship of the Church of Christ should recognise that Christ is to be found, not only within our churches, but in our hospitals and in our statute-book as well. This and this hath Christ done for our civilisation. We

recognise the stones when we see them, though they may have been transplanted far from the highway of saints.

And ever as we cross life's bleak and trackless moor, where the keen winds blow and wild birds rise at our side with loud and eerie cries, we find again and again, often in the most unexpected places, those evidences of the broken road. Here and there it runs broken, disjointed, and with many a gap between ; but we are hushed and gladdened as we come across those spiritual intuitions, great hints of God and intimations of immortality, which serve to keep us plodding on in the ineradicable conviction that there is a way, a goal for our soul's quest, that central shrine of our spirits by the far-off sea, that city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God. There is the meaning of our unending seeking ; there is the explanation of all our deep unrest. One day we shall sight its gleaming towers, high on its stately headland.

Is Jeremiah's experience so far removed from our own ? Have you no holding in God's field hard by the city gate ? Have you no hidden treasure for which you weighed out from a still heavier heart all the price for the land which the enemy holds ? Anathoth ! O field of Anathoth ! where we were hard put to it when love and faith and hope seemed all to have been taken from us in one dark hour. How can we bear to think of Anathoth, save that we are sure that where sin abounds grace will much more abound ? save that we believe that not the Chaldean Death, but Christ the Lord of life will yet have the treasure hid in that field ? We stake our all on that.

“ O death, where is thy sting ? O grave, where is thy victory ? ” And in the day of the great release it will be ours to voice the faith that sustained us through the long separation, as, looking into eyes that answer ours, we say : “ We saw you going, but knew you would come back.”

XIX

KINGS IN A CAVE

EVERY schoolboy knows the trick by means of which Hippomenes won the race with Atalanta, evincing a knowledge of human nature which enabled him to triumph where otherwise he might have failed. In the course of the running the wily Hippomenes dropped three golden apples, which Atalanta stopped to pick up, one after the other, and so compromised her fleetness of foot that she lost the race.

It is a trick which is played on all of us in some fashion or other in the race of life. We are beaten by circumstances and our own lack of judgment, rather than by the greater ability of our opponent. We compromise our natural advantages by mistaken attempts to do too much. We are apt to lose the prize of life through trying to secure its prizes.

Joshua was well aware of this when he issued the army order in regard to the treatment of the captured kings at the great and decisive battle of the valley of Aijalon. It was these five kings who had been the cause of the fight, and their capture was a signal triumph. But it proved also an immediate embarrassment. What should they do with them? Precious time was likely to be lost in holding a council of war as to what should be done with their prisoners now

that they had them. There was a grave risk that the enemy might make good use of such delay to reach their several strongholds and entrench themselves more securely. The Israelites were in danger of losing the fruit of their victory by not pursuing it to its completion. And without a moment's hesitation Joshua orders them to secure the kings as best they can in the meantime, and, whatever they did, to hasten on after the fleeing enemy. "Roll great stones unto the mouth of the cave, and set men by it for to keep them: *but stay not ye*; pursue after your enemies, and smite the hindmost of them; suffer them not to enter into their cities: for the Lord your God hath delivered them into your hand."

There is a certain poetic justice about those kings being pent up in the cave in which they had tried to take refuge from the consequences of their own rash conduct. It is sometimes a heavy enough punishment just to allow a defeated monarch to remain in the cave to which he has fled for refuge, and to see that he is not allowed to come out of that cave alive. What they had taken as the friendly shelter of a den, becomes the dark shadow of their perpetual dungeon. They are left to stew in their own juice.

Sometimes that is all the punishment which Almighty God seems to take upon a wrong-doer. Such an one has entered of his own evil will into some dark deed, and God just rolls great stones of remorse against the mouth of the cave, and leaves the man alone with his sin and its consequences. St. Jude says that "angels which kept not their first estate, but left their proper

habitation, he hath kept in everlasting bonds under darkness unto the judgment of the great day." It is a terrible thought ; but it has an element of comfort in it for Christian warriors who are wearied with the fight, and wonder why such enemies of God and man should be suffered to draw another tainted breath. Some of those pursuing Israelites may well have wondered why Joshua did not give those five kings short shrift, and be done with them. But Joshua had sufficient reasons which the end of the day and the conclusion of the fight made clear ; and for a little while those five wretched men were allowed to live. O sorely-tried servants of the Most High God, fight on and fear not ! He who directs the whole campaign knows what He is doing. You may seem to be toiling in pursuit while the enemies of God sit at ease in their self-chosen den. But you know not in what blackness of darkness they are sitting, nor how heavy are the stones which bar their exit. Better to be out in the swing and the sweat of the great fight than to be sitting in that blackness of darkness, hearing the rush of the troops of God as they push past you on to victory, and knowing that you are left out of it all, reserved for judgment when the end of the great day comes.

But why did Joshua not settle the problem of the captured kings right away ? Why did he leave them over until the end of the day ? Well, doubtless there were certain formalities to be gone through even in the execution of enemy rulers. The very carrying out of the penalty would have taken time, and would have distracted the thoughts, and perhaps

sapped the energies of the victorious Israelites, when they had still much to do. Bundle them into the cave and leave them there, said Joshua ; and get on with the more important work which you have in hand. " Roll great stones unto the mouth of the cave, and set men by it for to keep them : but stay not ye."

Some people swerve from their life's great purpose through the lure of the golden apples ; but I sometimes think that more are apt to be deflected from the nobler intention through the problem of the kings in the cave. Things are going well enough, when they are suddenly stayed in their pursuit through the discovery of five sinister figures crouching in the dark recesses of an unexplored cave. They are arrested by the discovery, and perhaps rather intrigued by it. For example, there are certain difficulties in the dealings of Providence in our own life and experience, or in the life and experience of others. We all come up against these difficulties sooner or later. Or it may be that the kings that give us pause are passages in the Bible that we can't explain, and that we don't want anybody to explain away for us. For all of us there are unfinished bits of our life, awkward questions, inexplicable happenings. Now to some people these things prove a kind of *pons asinorum* almost at the outset of their encounter with the many problems of life ; and failing to find their way across this bridge, they never come to grips with the far greater and far more interesting questions. And Joshua's advice is a real lesson on how to handle these initial problems of life and destiny. Don't waste time parleying with the five kings. Leave them and attend to more press-

ing work. Gather your own five wits together and get on with the bigger business. There will be plenty of time in the end of the day, when you have rounded up more urgent affairs, and carried judgment to victory, to come back and deal with the problem of the kings in the cave. First win the war, and then set about fixing the responsibility for the causing of it. "Some people won't do anything till certain prayers are answered. God says, 'We'll come back on that; follow on just now and do other work.' "

Some one once asked the founder of the Salvation Army what he made of the difficulties of the Bible. And the old man made a very characteristic and homely reply, a reply which contains a whole world of philosophy for the proper treatment of the cave kings of life and experience. General Booth did not deny, as some would-be devout and foolish people do try to deny, that there are any difficulties in the Bible. "I do in my reading of the Bible," he said, "what I do when I am eating a bloater. When I come across a bone, I just put it on one side of my plate, and go on till I find the next nourishing mouthful." The kings in the cave didn't give him five minutes thought, any more than they gave Joshua. He had far more pressing work in hand: the Lord's battle to win and a flying foe to chase. There would be time enough in the end of the great day to return and fix up Jonah's whale and the imprecatory psalms.

I wonder if your confident pursuit of the great issues of life has been checked at the cave of the kings? I wonder if you have ceased from fighting the foes of

the Lord because there has been a hold-up over some intellectual or moral difficulty? Do not be taken in by so hoary a booby-trap of the enemy. Believe me, the lions are chained, and if you will only push boldly on you will reach the Interpreter's House. Take Joshua's advice. Just leave those doubts and difficulties on one side for the present, and press on to strike some blow for the cause of God and righteousness. Roll a great stone to the mouth of the cave where the sinister creatures are lying. Why not roll, for example, that great monument of the Resurrection, the stone that was rolled away from the grave of the Risen Christ, for one of the great stones, unto the mouth of the cave where Giant Despair sits brooding? What are all your minor doubts and difficulties and trials and vexations in face of the fact that your Redeemer liveth, and that He shall stand upon the earth at the latter day? Push on in God's name, then. Don't, as Joshua warned you, let those misgivings and delays grow chronic. Don't give the enemy a chance to settle down in their fenced cities. Don't make the fight any harder than it need be, by neglecting to push on and occupy the posts where the enemy are fleeing. The things that you can do to help God and man are infinitely more and infinitely greater than the things that you can't do. The opportunities that beckon to you are the things to consider, not the opposition that would thwart you.

You remember that this was the advice which was given by the greater Joshua. There was a moment when the disciples were in danger of having their attention deflected from the path of service by idle

speculation over a philosophic problem of heredity and suffering. "Master, who did sin, this man, or his parents, that he should be born blind?" And Jesus just said to them, "We won't worry over that; but we'll go and see what we can do for the blind man."

And again, there came a time when Peter was desperately anxious to know what was going to happen to a friend of his in after-life. And once again Jesus said in effect, "Peter, old man, don't worry your old head about that. Just you follow Me." There were far too many things to be done in life to spend time over the kings in the dark cave. And the men who have followed most closely in the Master's footsteps are not those to whom everything has been made plain. They would readily acknowledge and confess that at the best they see through a glass darkly about most of the great issues of life. But it is enough for them to know that one day they shall know even as also they are known. Meanwhile they have but one care, and that is to work the works of Him that sent them while it is day; that at the great roll-call they may not be found empty-handed. You know that such a one has his spiritual skeletons hidden away in some cupboard, his five sinister figures walled up in some cave. But he is coming nearer gaining the final victory every hour he lives. Like Faber's "Country Labourer,"

" Always his downcast eye
Was laughing silently,
As if he found some jubilee in thinking;
For his one thought was God,
In that one thought he abode
For ever in that thought more deeply sinking."

One of the greatest secrets of ultimate success in life is knowing how to treat the problem of the kings in the cave. There is no branch of knowledge, there is no pursuit on which we can engage, in which we will not soon come up against aspects which present for the time being insoluble difficulties.

If you cannot answer the first or the second question in the examination paper of life, don't waste time over these, but go on to one at which you think you can make a pretty good attempt. By the time you have fairly tackled it, you will have gone far to prepare yourself for the answering of that which at the first blush seemed beyond you. Every student knows this. Every business man knows it. And what I would plead for is that we should extend the same treatment to all the intellectual, moral, and spiritual difficulties of life. A man sometimes tells me that he has not faced up to the question of his standing with God because of the intellectual or moral difficulties which confronted him on a cursory examination of the religious question. Granted that there are some far from obvious intellectual problems in the Christian religion ; granted that there are patent obstacles in the untransformed lives of professing Christians, do you mean to say that there are none of God's questions that challenge your attention ? Will you dare to tell the great Examiner in the end of the day that there was not a single problem that you felt called upon to tackle ? If there were five kings in the back of a dark cave, there were fifty men in broad daylight whom you should have met in equal contest.

This is the secret of ultimate victory in life, that a man should just frankly acknowledge to himself that there are certain questions which he must be content to leave on one side for the present. To shelve a thing does not necessarily mean to shirk it. There are some things which you can never understand until you have earned the right to understand them, by returning victorious from the fight. Whatever you do, see that doubt does not settle down into denial. Do not allow the enemy to entrench himself in any of the fenced cities from which it will be too late to try and dislodge him. Just leave the things that are too high for you where they stand, and press on to do some bit of service for God and man. Do anything but dally. "Roll great stones unto the mouth of the cave ; but stay not ye." The secret of the Lord is with those that pursue the enemy, not with those that never get beyond the idols of the cave. There is an injunction given twice over in the Bible, both in the Old Testament and in the New Testament, which contains the root of the matter for all honest minds and faithful souls. "Then shall we know," says one of the prophets, "if we follow on to know." And Jesus countersigned that promise for us. "He that doeth the will shall know of the doctrine."

And in the end of the day there will be nothing that is not plain to those who have fought and conquered with their leader. Our Joshua will then call to all faithful warriors to come near and put their feet upon the necks of the cave kings. "And afterwards Joshua smote them, and hanged them on five trees. And it came to pass at the time of the going down of the sun, that Joshua commanded, and they took them down

off the trees, and cast them into the cave wherein they had hidden themselves, and laid great stones on the mouth of the cave, unto this very day. And all the people returned to the camp to Joshua in peace." Trust Joshua.

XX

THE GREATEST LOVE-STORY IN THE WORLD

"The Lord did not set his love upon you, nor choose you, because . . . but because——."—DEUT. vii. 7, 8.

THIS is one of the most delightfully illogical and inconsequent attempts at reasoning that one has ever heard. The speaker is endeavouring to explain one of the profoundest mysteries of all experience, the mystery which baffled another thinker when he exclaimed, "What is man, that Thou art mindful of him? And the son of man, that thou visitest him?" The Psalmist just frankly gives it up. But Moses, good soul, thinks he can put his finger on the reason, and ends up by giving us this illuminating statement, "The Lord loved you because he loved you." That is what his argument comes to when you track it down. "The Lord did not set his love upon you, nor choose you, because ye were more in number than any people; for ye were the fewest of all peoples: but because——" Yes, Moses, now just why was it? that's what we have all been wondering, ever since the day when He first showed us His great love: "but because——"? And Moses, bless his heart, for all his posing as Sir Oracle, makes us no wiser than we were before—"because the Lord loved you."

That's what comes of attempting the impossible. With all his wit and legal acumen, the lawgiver of Israel finds himself as utterly at a loss, when it comes to explaining the real riddle of the universe, as the humblest poor sinner who has tasted that the Lord is gracious. He sets out bravely enough to make his authentic pronouncement, and ends up by floundering in the sea of love as hopelessly as any of us.

That other keen legal mind, St. Paul, often gets tied up in just the same kind of way. He enters on some profound argument, and gradually you find argument and grammar both going, and he just breaks out of the entanglement like a lion bursting through the under-growth of a jungle, breaks out into a song of praise to Him who loved us because—— No wonder both Moses and Paul flounder, keen intellects though they are, because this is the logic of Love—to be utterly illogical. This is Love's privilege—to be unable to explain herself or to account for her actions. This is exactly the kind of way she goes on. This is precisely the language she uses and the argument she employs. “I have loved thee because . . .” Because you're you. This is a woman's reason: “*Because*——” And don't listen any further if you really expect an explanation, because there isn't any. There never was. There never will be, unless that great Love works her own miracle, and makes you really lovable in the end. Here is the greatest love-story in the world ; and at the heart of it the same dear old illogical reasoning, “I have loved thee because——”

“The Lord did not set his love upon you, nor choose you, because ye were more in number than any people ; for ye were the fewest of all peoples.” That is to say,

when it comes to dealing with love, you have got to rule out at once all the ordinary motives which usually sway a man's actions. When you are trying to find out the reason for anybody's ever having done anything so extraordinary as to fall in love with *you*, you had better begin with the most unlikely trait in your make-up that you can fix upon. It was for no obvious reason. It certainly wasn't because there was anything big or outstanding about you. If you begin to figure it out along those lines you will most certainly come to grief. You were chosen for some utterly inadequate and even ludicrous reason. And just be very humble, and very thankful you were chosen. You probably will never be able to explain it satisfactorily all your days.

Now, says Moses, the same delightful and divine illogicality holds good in the wooing of the soul by God. There is no reason in heaven or earth why God should have taken all this trouble to give you proof of His love, and to endeavour to win yours in return. He loves us, just "because." "It wasn't because you were more in number than any people," he says to the people of Israel. And then he goes on to rub in the sense of their inadequacy to be considered for one moment fit objects for the Divine love, by adding almost brutally, "for ye were the fewest of all people." An earthly monarch would never for one moment have dreamt of forming an alliance or making a liaison with a feeble little folk like you. God Almighty was just as delightfully illogical and unreasoning about it as He was when, having made the sun to rule the day and the moon to rule the night, in the sheer joy of His heart He dipped

His hand deep in His bag, and flung the stars about the sky, and then laughed as He thought with pleasure on all those who down the long ages would thank Him for making the stars also. "He made the stars also," says the sacred chronicler; and he lets the bare statement go at that, for he can find no adequate reason for the Divine prodigality and in consequence. God is just like His Son's own Good Samaritan who, next morning, took out two pence, for no reason in the wide world but just that, having done one kind action, he thought he would go one better. He is like a man I know who, having already sent one substantial cheque for a good cause in which I was interested, shortly afterwards sent me another; and when I ventured to explain, and was prepared to remonstrate, just told me to mind my own business, or words to that effect. You never can explain the ways of love, and you'll only get into a hopeless tangle if you try to.

Isn't that part of the reason for our backwardness in believing and resting in the love of God, that we don't realise that God who made us in His own image loves us in precisely the same dear old illogical fashion in which we all love? We fancy that He must needs be dazzled with size, "enamoured by hugeness, in love with avoirdupois." "The Lord did not love you because ye were more in number than any people." That's just the trouble with our faith. That's what tends to choke our prayers: that we simply can't believe that the prayer of a child by its crib means far more to God than all the swinging planets that go marching round His throne. It may be strange; it may be unbelievable; it may be illogical; but then it's just love all over.

If there is anybody who simply cannot for the life of him see why God should love him, or listen to his prayer, or give him one moment's thought, you have hit on the very reasons why He does it all. He loves you, just "because—"

I read a letter the other day from a working smith who has made some beautiful wrought-iron gates. He had been thanked and praised for his work, and this is what he replied: "It is indeed a great privilege to get an opportunity to do good work, and one is grateful to those who make it possible for us to do so. I am indeed glad to be a smith and to have the delight of taking a somewhat stubborn metal and shaping it into pleasing forms—to make iron into something like poetry is to me a satisfying destiny." I suppose that is why the Divine Artificer chose you and me to work on. He might have chosen gold, a more pliable and more precious metal. But something about the very stubbornness of the iron appealed to Him, and He came down to the workshop and wrought, although the fires scorched His blessed face, and the iron tore hands and feet, and pierced His side. You simply can't explain it. I suppose He just looked up to His Father from the midst of the fires, and said, "To make iron into something like poetry is to Me a satisfying destiny."

If you try to reason it out along the ordinary lines of logic, you won't make much of it. If you try to explain what brought the Son of God to Calvary, or what sent Livingstone to Africa, or Christie to Moukden, I advise you to give it up, if you think of applying ordinary standards. They told Dugald Christie that he was "throwing himself away" when he announced

his intention of going out as a medical missionary to China. Read his *Thirty Years in Moukden*, and see what God can do with a life that is content to be thrown away. When love tries to be logical, in that moment it dies, and brings forth no fruit.

I received lately from India a letter from another of our missionaries, a man who was a brilliant student of philosophy, a lecturer in the subject in Glasgow University, and the late Principal Caird's prizeman. I have seen the row of his beautifully bound prize volumes, all riddled with worm and warped with the damp, in his bungalow in India. He also thought he would like to throw his life away in the high places of the field, and he has probably done more than any other living man to commend the gospel of Christ to the educated classes of the great town in Western India where his life has been spent. I had the privilege of sending him the other month a sum of money to help him in prosecuting some special advance among the people of his care, in which he had sought my assistance. Through the kindness of one or two friends to whom I never appeal in vain, for they like to trade with the means wherewith God has blessed them, I was able to send my friend a practical expression of our sympathy and support. And this was his reply :

“ Your letter and its enclosure came to me by last mail and brought with it extraordinary comfort and cheer. I cannot express to you sufficiently what its coming meant to us and means to us, for we were feeling particularly ‘ down,’ and it brought a message of cheer far beyond its present exchange value or the exchange value of any period in history. To think

that you and your people, so promptly, and when you might well have considered that your immediate duty had been well done, should have responded to my wail from this far-off region, is a tremendous encouragement and a real rebuke to depression and failing faith. Will you take to yourself and convey to your people my deep gratitude? This kindness and sympathy that you have shown will be a lamp for us through many dark hours that shall come.

“I fear that they must come to us here, as they are coming, it would seem, to you and to all the world. Things go wrong so easily, and once they have gone wrong it seems so impossible to get them right again. Problems are looming up before us on every side. But ‘looming up’ is not the right metaphor. They are much more active than that would suggest. I envisage them as horned cattle that, with tail in air and head well down, are bearing down upon us from every direction. India so grievously needs, and in so many senses, a message of reconciliation. . . . I sometimes long desperately for a lodge in some wilderness, or in the words of Weller senior, ‘to keep a pike.’ But it is courage and faith that one needs. Well, it helps one to have a little more courage and a little more faith when one realises anew that there are such kind hearts and such true and responsive hearts in auld Scotland.—I am, yours gratefully.”

I have not quoted that so striking and so poignant letter from a brave and brilliant man struggling with adverse circumstances in order that we should remind ourselves how much a letter may mean, and what good a gift may do for more than those for whom it was originally intended, although if we realised our

powers and our opportunities as we ought, there would be fewer letters unwritten and fewer gifts held back. What I would ask is, how can you account for a man taking on such service, unless you find the key in Calvary and go back to the illogicality of redeeming love. Every time, when you find a servant of God, at home or abroad, employing talents that would have won him fame and riches in any other sphere of activity, for a wage that a scavenger would despise ; when you find a soldier dying in a ditch for an ungrateful country in return for a shilling a day ; when you find a girl sacrificing herself for a peevish and querulous old parent ; when you come across a woman denying herself for an exacting tyrant of a husband ; when you behold the Man standing in silence, while they spit in His blessed face, and going forth bearing His cross ; there is only the one explanation—"I have loved thee, because——"

The fact is that we get hopelessly entangled when we attempt to get beyond that "because." Jesus gave no reason for the erratic behaviour of the father who, when his scapegrace son was yet a great way off, saw him, and had compassion, and ran, and fell on his neck and kissed him. Nine times out of ten we are right in our intuitions, and nine times out of ten we are wrong in the reasons we give for following them. I have never yet come across a completely satisfactory theory of the Atonement ; and yet there is no *fact* that is more completely satisfying. I am content to say, "He loved me, and gave Himself for me—*because*," and to leave it at that. I know that God is never impressed by size, or fancied merit, or any of the things that so impress us. And so when

I come to Him for pardon for my sins, and for an ear to hear my prayer, and a heart to share my sorrows, I will not allow myself to be bullied by appearances, or badgered by circumstances.

As Kipling sings :

“ Who clears the grounding berg,
And guides the grinding floe,
He hears the cry of the little kit fox,
And the lemming on the snow.”

I have said that this is the most wonderful love-story in the world. So it is. And a love-story is never arguable, whatever else it may be. “ God so loved the world that he gave his only-begotten Son.” Why ? Just *because* !

XXI

A SHINING EPITAPH

“ He built the higher gate.”

THIS surely is one of the most beautiful epitaphs in the world. The man of whom it is written did some wise things and many foolish ones in his day ; but long after he had passed to his account, men and women were still going in and out by the new opening he had made for them. “ The rest of the acts of Jotham, and all that he did,” may have been written in the book of the chronicles of the kings of Judah ; but people are not fond of reading chronicles of any kind, and the public memory is amazingly short. Here was at least one thing which Jotham did for the people of his time and the after years, which would never be forgotten, because it was written in their hearts. And whether they admired its beauty and dignity from afar, or passed beneath it as they went to worship, the after-ages remembered the man who had given them this new way into the house of God and the business of life, and whispered gratefully, “ He built the higher gate.” Is it not indeed a shining and a sufficient epitaph ? This be the verse you grave for me if it have aught of truth in it at the end of the working day : “ He built the higher gate.”

So much in life depends upon the way you approach a subject. How a dull and uninviting stud, may be made attractive and suggestive of infinite possibilities in the hands of a capable and imaginative teacher! And, on the other hand, cannot the very beauties of literature and the inspiration of music be made dull and even hateful by the introduction thereto imparted by a soulless pedant? What was it that first attracted you to a certain line of study? Was it not just the enthusiasm of a beloved teacher who was steeped in his subject, and who made you feel that there was simply nothing else worth while save the pursuit of this particular branch of knowledge? What made you take up that hobby? You simply couldn't resist the enthusiasm of the entomologist who convinced you that all the romance of the world as to be found in the leg of a grasshopper or the habits of the black beetle. And, again, why was it that you took years to get over your aversion to the *Odes* of Horace or Portia's speech in *The Merchant of Venice*? Nothing but hateful memories of dreary hours spent in a classroom whose tyrant was content to make you construe and analyse and parse, until Horace came to be associated with the tawse, and Shakespeare himself was the "onlie begetter" of punishment lines. For years you were cheated out of your heritage in literature because you had the misfortune to be ushered in by the lower gate.

And so for those who teach the young, or instruct the ignorant, or draw up prospectuses, or initiate any kind of enterprise, it is well to bear in mind the paramount importance of the kind of gateway they make. If it be made wide and high and attractive

it will not only draw men naturally to enter by it, but will largely influence their whole attitude and conduct once they enter within. Long after other seemingly more important things that you did, and that you fondly imagined would be written in the not altogether unread chronicles of your life, have been wholly forgotten, one and another, grown to manhood and womanhood, persuaded by the way you presented certain things to them to take some interest and share in them, will remember you gratefully as one who built for them the higher gate.

But there are those of whom this beautiful word is true because in the whole realm of thought and conduct generally they had a way of opening up new doors for people. I think there is no feeling of which we are all more habitually conscious, no feeling more productive of depression and even despair, than just that of being hopelessly shut in and trapped by the four bare walls of duty and fate. These are our circumstances ; there is our horizon fixed and determined for ever. It makes it no easier to endure our lot to reflect that we ourselves helped to build the enclosing walls, or that they were built by the selfishness and thoughtlessness of others. *The* tragedy of life is the tragedy of the insensate madness for building walls. God Almighty never built a wall. He made dividing rivers and separating seas in order to make love try its wings and human genius build ships. Even when man tries to make God his accomplice in this business of keeping people out of things, God covers the man-made hedgerow with tender green and induces little birds to come and build in the thick-set separator, for the glory of His name, and

that the poor prisoners may at least have a song. But man builds great ugly walls, with cutting glass on the top of them. He builds them in the Church, and if kindly Time, God's angel, loosens the mortar here, and makes some of the stones crumble there, man and the devil hasten to the spot and build the thing up again, lest divided fragments of the Church of Christ should get to know each other better and come together. In the State and in society what are we doing all the time, most of us, but building up walls of division and misunderstanding between ourselves and our fellows ? The tragedy of life is the tragedy of the wall that need never have been, should never have been ; and how quickly and how high these walls of estrangement can grow in families and among old friends ! The name of the enemy of mankind is Balbus.

And in the mercy of God, as a kind of offset against the mania of Balbus, there are Jothams here and there, kindly creatures of the farther vision, who go about piercing doors and windows in the walls that make the prisons of their fellows. They open the kingdom of earth to all believers. To their fellowship belong all true poets and artists, and every honest workman who turns out the best work of which he is capable. Jotham could not ensure that people would find in life all that he had found in it ; but he made it as easy as possible for them to do so. We are not told just what purpose he had in mind when he built the upper gate. It may have been to let a little more light and air in where it was badly needed. Perhaps it was to make a short cut for tired folk, so that they would not have to go away round by the

old low gate. He could not force people to enter the house of the Lord, but he was anxious to make it as easy and inviting for them to do so as he could. He did not allow himself to be put off by his advisers who said, "Oh, but there is a gate there already: if people really want these things they will quickly enough find the way in." It mattered nothing to him that there were the old ways of approach. If he could make it easier and more inevitable to turn in to the house of quiet and refreshing, he would do so.

We cannot control the lives of others, but we can influence the whole course of them by helping them to enter at the right gate. Some people have a grudge against life because they saw it first at a wrong point of view. They have got low-gate impressions of duty, and work, and God, and the soul. "Get into life," was the great word that Jesus cried to rally souls that were sick with introspection, and spirits that had become flabby from too much discussion and too little doing. But He also opened for men "a new and living way." *He* built the higher gate, and showed men what life might be and what it might lead to.

And this is just what people are seeking for to-day. The meaning of all the unrest and moving to and fro is just the surging of a mob that is trying to find a door of escape from their stone-wall surroundings. The sense of imprisonment has become intolerable. And it won't do to put up a few grudging turnstiles through which the few may squeeze on payment of the price. What is needed, if catastrophe is to be averted, is a new outlet altogether, something big and high and gracious, so that all may go in and

out, and find pasture. The door is going to be the safety-valve. Jotham is going to be the saviour of his country.

Tired and jaded people will always seek some kind of escape from their surroundings. What is it going to be? Is it merely some low postern that opens easily out into the night? Or are we as Christian men and women earning for ourselves the kind of reputation that Jotham made? Have you ever introduced somebody who was not very discriminating in the choice of his ways of spending his leisure, to the beauties of literature, or the pleasures of good music, or the fascination of athletics? If so, you have played the part of Jotham to such. It was only a door that you opened; but it opened on to the higher pursuits of life, and led to God knows what of pure delight and perhaps sheer salvation. Unscrupulous characters make it their business to offer some kind of way out of life as it is to the heedless mass, because they know well that there's money in it. All that a Christian can do is to build the higher gate. Jotham was the founder of the Boys' Brigade and the Girls' Guildry and kindred enterprises. His spirit has inspired all social work for the betterment of the lot of those who cannot find the way out for themselves.

Or, again, surely it is incumbent upon us to cultivate the attitude of this man in all the intercourse of daily life. Don't be content to acquiesce in the general level of talk round about you. People are shaking their heads in suspicion over So-and-so's conduct. Things certainly do look pretty black. But is it impossible to put a kindlier construction on what he did? Is there not another explanation and way out?

Build you the higher gate, even though it should lead nowhere. People will think the more of you for making the attempt. Don't ask about any judgment merely, Is it true? but find out if it is altogether fair. Don't be content with the attitude towards your work of "Will it do?" You owe it to yourself to do the very best you can. Build the highest gate of which you are capable.

This is religion—building the higher gate. All the trouble to-day comes from the fact that for multitudes of people life is lived under artificial conditions, at whichever end of the social scale the unfortunates happen to be. We have all been guilty of putting the emphasis on the wrong things. One thinks of the utter pathos of the last days in the life of the French poet, Verlaine, who died a few years ago. Brilliant as he was, his mind had become weakened through the dissipation of the Boulevards, and he occupied his hours of monotony in painting the cheap deal chairs and tables of his dingy garret with gilt paint. To his demented fancy that pot of gilt paint made the poet's sordid chambers as splendid as the royal palace with its furnishings of gold. In the dream of that tragic unreality the man lived and died. The delusion of the gold paint is everywhere to-day. The world is waiting for the Jotham who will utter the "Sesame" that will let them out of this cave of ghastly glitter and choking unreality into freedom and sunlight and safety.

You to whom Christ has given the one word that can open the door to all for which the heart of man sighs, are you passing the word round? Do you realise your power? You recall how Browning spoke of one

who built the higher gate in life for him. He too was oppressed with that intolerable sense of prison walls and grey stone barricades of fate.

“ World—how it walled about
Life with disgrace
Till God’s own smile came out;
That was thy face ! ”

Not even a deed, not a single word ; only a look of love and sympathy, and the wall was breached.

And this leads us to remember that the religion of Jesus Christ is *the* higher gate. It was the “ higher gate of the house of the Lord ” that Jotham built. If you read his life-story you will see that he did his people many good turns. “ He built cities in the hill country of Judah, and in the forests he built castles and towers.” That was all excellent. To have planned and built garden cities, and to have encouraged a love of forests and the countryside was to have done much for the physical and spiritual well-being of his people. But even garden cities cannot save the soul, although there are some who talk as if that kind of enterprise were enough. No amount of social amelioration can give the heart of man that which shall fully satisfy it. On the monument to Rowland Hill they inscribed words that read very like those that men used of Jotham : “ He gave us penny postage.” The words echo a little drearily to-day now that we are robbed of that gift. Circumstances may revoke the labours of philanthropy. It is only a tribute like that which Jotham won which remains unaffected by the passage of the years.

There are so many ways of approaching every subject ; but in nothing is the manner of approach so vital as the kind of gate we build for those who come for the first time to the house of the Lord. Our Lord opened the kingdom of heaven to all believers, and there is an Easter glow and gladness ever streaming through that high gate. What are you doing in this respect ? Have you made religion attractive for your children and those whom your conduct and example influences ? What about this very matter of entering the house of the Lord ? Have you made it appear for you the arch of triumph into each new God-given week, or do you come as though you were trying to squeeze through the grudging wicket of duty ? Do you enter to pay your glad homage week by week to the God of your salvation, or are you just borne along through the broad entrance in the rush of weekly routine ? Of this man it was said that he gave people new conceptions of worship, loftier ways of approaching religious questions. He gave them something high to look up to as they went in and out.

This is the greatest gift you can impart to any life. There are low ways of entering even the holiest precincts. It's desperately easy to criticise the Church, and to find fault with the whole scheme of revealed religion. It's easy to be cynical about life. But you can help others to approach these things at a high and helpful angle, or blight the thought of religion in another's life for ever. Some way into life and the great mysteries of experience you are opening even now for some one. Once he has entered and is in the midst of the experience for himself, how will he look back to the formative years of youth

and to you who brought him to the threshold of life ? To each of us God has given this awful gift of influence. We cannot renounce it even if we would. We exercise it every hour we live. Years after this, when our opportunity is for ever gone, how will they think of us—the comrade at our side, the child in our home, the mate at our bench, the friend in our set ? As they recall the way we handled the problems of life, and spoke of the deep things of experience, and faced the mystery of the future, will they thank God upon every remembrance of us, and say, For me, at any rate, he built the higher gate ?

XXII

AN ACID TEST

IN the account of the Trial of our Lord in the Fourth Gospel there occurs at one point an arresting sequence. "Now the servants and the officers were standing there, having made a fire of charcoal; for it was cold; and they were warming themselves: and Peter also was with them, standing and warming himself. The high priest *therefore* asked Jesus of his disciples." The charcoal brazier apparently was standing in the courtyard of Annas's palace; but the faces of those gathered about it could be plainly seen by those within the hall where the examination of Jesus was going on. It is a picture with which we are very familiar—a cold night of stars and full moon; the fitful spitting of the charcoal making those bending too near start suddenly back; the red glow reflected from well-polished shield or breastplate or helmet. The farcical examination of Jesus is proceeding none too satisfactorily from the point of view of Annas and his gang, one feeble charge after another threatening to break down. Suddenly among the huddling figures round the fire is seen emerging from the gloom behind and appearing within the ring of glowing light a haggard, drawn, and anxious face. Annas may not have realised who it was—a venturesome follower of the Nazarene; but by one of those inexplicable kind

of impulses which are apt to stir at critical and tense moments, a thought flashes through the labouring mind of the astute old politician, and he switches his line of cross-examination on to another tack. This Jesus, if he has really done so much good as some have tried to make out, will surely have one or two friends who are ready to appear in his defence. The night is cold ; his fortunes are at their lowest ebb. Three years of ministry and service, and not a single friend to come and stand up for him ! Looks like an impostor, doesn't he ? There were some disciples in the garden with him when the soldiers took him, Annas has been told. All forsook him and fled, did they ? Here is a real weak spot in the defence. Surely if this man were the Son of God he would have some one to come forward at all costs as advocate. And there is a wicked gleam in the old inquisitor's eye, and he rubs his hands with anticipatory glee as he begins to see light on his nefarious plans, and a chance of rushing the condemnation through before dawn disturbs the Judæan hills. "The high priest then asked Jesus of his disciples."

The crafty old fox knew what he was doing in fastening upon what seemed the weak spot in Jesus's case. The disciples had forsaken him and fled. Whom could he point to ? What evidence could he adduce to show that he was building up a body of devoted followers ? Was his mission after all Divine if he could not show a single man who was prepared to stake his life upon it ? Wise words and good deeds and moral reformation are all very well ; but the acid test is in the kind of men a religion makes. Annas and Caiaphas and Pilate can find no fault in Jesus himself, but he is vulnerable in the persons of his disciples ; and

like a hawk the wily old ecclesiastic takes in the situation, and taunts Jesus with being unable to produce a single supporter in his hour of need. Unable to damage the reputation of his Prisoner at a single point, Annas gloats over the thought that he has laid him by the Achilles' heel at last. Having tapped the whole line of defence and found nothing whereof he might accuse him, Annas probes in to the weak spot where he can break through at last, as he fancies. The disciples of Jesus will prove his give-away. Question after question having failed to evoke one glimmer of excuse for his outrageous behaviour, "the high priest then asked Jesus of his disciples."

The hostile world has always shown an unfailing aptitude for fastening on the too obviously vulnerable spot in the scheme of Jesus. Of course it is grossly unfair. It isn't cricket. It's scarcely common sense, much less chivalry. It argues a crass want of insight. The Man Christ Jesus should be judged on His own merits. It really has nothing to do with the case that now and then an elder of the Church absconds, and that even the best of His professing disciples are most terrible give-aways of Christianity. But in looking around to secure a ready and hasty excuse for hurrying Jesus out of their thoughts and out of their lives, unfriendly judges are in the habit of doing to-day precisely what Annas did. Christ Himself they cannot attack ; in Him indeed they find no fault ; but with a malicious gleam of triumph in their eye, and a savage accent of certainty in their voice, they fasten on the members of Christ's Church. Just try and win a man for Christ, and ten

to one you will find him begin to question you hard and vigorously about the disciples of Jesus. They have a kind of instinctive feeling that this is a safe and easy way of disposing of the claims of Christ Himself.

It's illogical ; it is not really any argument. No genuine lover of truth and beauty would ever dream of attacking the world's most gracious Figure in this hooligan and footpad fashion. It *is* beneath contempt. But then what would you expect from a mind and outlook like that of Annas ? And while the charge is one that will never under any circumstances be brought by a genuine seeker after truth, yet there is just enough sting about this ready taunt to make it a not ineffective weapon in the hand of an unscrupulous and malicious opponent. These rough-and-ready judges, nosing about for the quickest way of getting the claims of Christ settled in the way they have made up their minds they shall be settled ; those traffickers in sin, disturbed in their evil courses by the shadow of a pure life falling across them, and bent only on sweeping away all opposition as quickly and thoroughly as possible, suddenly catch sight of a weapon lying to their hand. "There's your professing Church member," they exclaim with unholy glee, gloating over the fall of some too self-confident disciple. "If that is all your Christ can show in the way of disciples, I don't want to have anything to do with the Church." They are joyful in the discovery of what they are pleased to consider another excuse for the drugging of their conscience and the evasion of their own responsibility.

It is an unfair, it is an unreasonable way that the Annases of to-day have, but the fact for our con-

sideration is that this is the way they are judging Christ and finding excuse for hurrying Him out of their lives. "As Tommy sees us"—it is nothing to the point that Tommy may have a bad squint or congenital myopia. We have got to do with what he sees, not with the way in which he looks. And after all, even though he had shivered the long night through, Peter should have been standing, not by the fire, but by the side of his Master. The question would have died on Annas's lips if Jesus had been able to point to the Galilean fisherman at His side, rough, impulsive, not too polished in tongue, but with a heart of gold, and ready to go anywhere and suffer anything at his Master's side.

Instead of that, what does the picture show us? A man scarcely distinguishable in ought save accidentals from the avowed enemies of Jesus; one who in his anxiety not to be mistaken again for a disciple of the Nazarene, outdoes even the soldiers themselves in the coarseness of his language, in act and attitude. "The servants and the officers were standing there, having made a charcoal fire; for it was cold; and they were warming themselves: and Peter also was with them, standing and warming himself." You feel at once that the degree of intimacy between disciple and enemies is altogether too much. There is absolutely no suggestion of contrast. Friend and foe alike are blended into one indistinguishable blur in the uncertain light of that glowing brazier.

Now, while there are few things more obnoxious than any suggestion of the "holier-than-thou" attitude in the disciple of Christ, surely it ought to be no hard matter to distinguish a loyal disciple from an

avowed enemy, or one who is an unconvinced outsider. The night is dark and it is cold, very cold. Christ, and all He stands for, and has come to bring the world, are on trial. And the world of ordinary men will light such fires as they can, to protect themselves against the chill night air ; and, being a gregarious animal, man and man will gather about the common fire. “ They were standing and warming themselves : and Peter also was with them, standing and warming himself.” It is not desirable, it is not even possible, that the Christian disciple should hold himself aloof from the common ways and practices of men. But the onlookers were more struck with Simon Peter’s desire to get his share of the fire that night than with his solicitude about anything else. Twice over within a few verses the statement is repeated. “ Peter was standing and warming himself.” It seems to have impressed them unfavourably, although they were not specially concerned for Jesus. Great issues were at stake that night. His best friend was on His trial : yet Peter’s one thought seems to have been anxiety lest that fire should be allowed to go out, and his personal comfort suffer.

“ The high priest therefore asked Jesus of his disciples.” If they really were men like that, even the best of them, even the one who cared enough about the ultimate fate of his Master to follow Him into the palace, there was surely something wrong. And the unfriendly world cannot be altogether blamed if it expresses at least mild surprise, that in an hour when vital religious issues are at stake, the Christian disciple should be practically indistinguishable from those who have no interest whatsoever in the matter. It is quite

healthy to mix with the world and do as it does ; but the outside critic cannot be altogether blamed if he feels that there is something wrong when the disciple is so obviously intent on the pursuit of material comfort, while all that the Master holds dear is going through the most critical hour in its history. It was lips still wet with the wine of the Last Supper that said, "I know not the man." It was one in whose ears had sounded but a brief hour ago the solemn injunction, "This do in remembrance of me," who seemed to be thinking of no one and nothing but his own physical well-being as he claimed his share of the world's fire. "The high priest therefore asked Jesus of his disciples." And it was the only question all His life that had ever made Him wince.

The fires of comfort are piled high these cold nights. It is possible to do a great deal nowadays to make one's self forget the prevalent discomfort. It is easier than ever for the distinguishing marks that betray the disciple to be overlooked and forgotten. It is round some of the best-going fires that many of the disciples are gathered nowadays. Is there not rather more than a danger that we shall forget how critical an hour it is for the fortunes of all for which the Master came to earth ? Is it greatly to be wondered at if the cynical onlooker says to himself, "Can the claims of this Jesus of Nazareth be so paramount if the disciple betrays not a sign of apprehension as to how the issue of the long night will go, as to what kind of a day will dawn for the cause of Jesus Christ ?" Judged by the attitude of the disciple whose one absorption seems to be his own material comfort, it doesn't really seem to matter very much what happens to the cause

of Christ. Is that really the inference we intend unsympathetic critics to deduce from our conduct? And yet can we wonder if that is their final inference after scrutinising the attitude of so many of the disciples of Christ in these decisive days?

I sometimes think that in nothing is the Divine consciousness of Jesus more evidently shown or more clearly set forth, than in the fact of His amazing, His daring faith in the men and women whom He has charged to remember Him, and to hold forth the evidence of their remembrance of Him before the gaze of the world. If there is a call for faith in God on the part of man it is nothing to the call for faith in man on the part of God. Well did our Lord realise the presence of what would seem to be a weak spot in His scheme for the redemption of the world. He knew very well that men would ask Him of His disciples. No one saw more clearly than He the tremendous risk He ran in committing His treasure to such frail earthen vessels. It would have been far easier and far more congenial for Him to have made His appeal only to a select coterie of "souls." Those cultured Greeks who came to Jerusalem for the express purpose of seeking Him out would never have let Him down. He might have gone with them and established a school in whose sheltered cloisters He could have expounded, developed, and unfolded all the riches of His mind and heart. In such congenial company there would have been no room for misunderstanding. There would have been no criticism, only unbounded reverence for the amazing wisdom of the great Teacher. There would have been no

Gethsemane, no Annas, no cross. Surely it was that thought, that momentary fierce temptation which occasioned that mysterious soul-trouble of the Saviour at the visit of the Greeks. The world would certainly have been blessed in that way, but it would not have been saved, and "therefore came I forth." The gift of God had to be placed within the offer of every man, those who could understand and those who seemed incapable of understanding, those who would welcome and those who would refuse. With amazing daring Jesus committed His cause to us. He cast the bread of life upon the turbulent waters of man's unrestrained, undisciplined free will, in the sublime confidence that He would find it again after many days. Knowing that they would ask Him of His disciples, knowing the risk He was running, He chose to trust the people. He was the first true Democrat. "Surely they are My people, children that will not lie; so He was their Saviour."

Some one has imagined the amazement among the hosts of heaven at this sublime act of daring. Gabriel greets the Victor returning from His awful conflict, and rejoices in the victory He has achieved. "But, Lord, have You safeguarded the fruits of Your costly victory? Have You ensured that the good news will go round the world? What precautions have You taken?" And Christ made quiet reply that He was trusting to His disciples. "I have told Peter and John and the others all about it. They are good fellows; they will not betray My trust. I opened My heart and mind to Mary and to Martha and their friends. The women are all right." "But, Lord, suppose they should forget, and fail You, have You

taken no further precautions to ensure the establishment of Your Kingdom, all for which You have fought and suffered and died?" "No, I have taken no further precautions. Peter and John and Mary and the others will tell their friends, and their friends will tell their friends, and so the good news will go round the world, and so through the ages the will of the Father will be done until at last the Kingdom come." "Lord, are You not afraid when they ask You of Your disciples?" And those eyes of infinite compassion grow to a wideness of wonder. "Afraid, good Gabriel? You don't know My Peter and John. You don't know Mary and her sisters."

And I sometimes think that the great trusting Master of us all relies on memory as one of His sure allies. And that is why Communion seasons come, with all their poignant power to stir our hearts by way of remembrance. You know that this particular Greek word for a charcoal fire occurs only twice in the whole of the New Testament. It is used of this fire where Simon was warming himself on the betrayal night, when all the interests of God and of humanity were being betrayed into the hands of sinners. And it is used but once again, when, after the Resurrection, the disciples saw through the early morning mist that dim Figure standing on the shore of the lake. "So when they got out upon the land, they see a fire of charcoal there, and fish laid thereon, and bread." You know—of course you do—the almost unique power of the sense of smell to awaken memory. And when once again the pungent fumes of charcoal floated to him on the keen early morning air, and the birds of dawning began to cry to the new day from distant

lake-shore villages, Simon remembered and understood, and drew near and warmed himself. And as He broke the bread once again to the contrite disciple, the Saviour saw of the travail of His soul, and was satisfied.

XXIII

THE SYRIAN SNEER

WHEN the Israelites were about to enter the land of Canaan, their leader took an opportunity of telling them the kind of life and the general conditions which they might expect. Egypt was now but a memory to most of them, but their recollection of it was of a flat countryside. Life henceforward would be different in outlook and in experience. "The land, whither ye go to possess it, is a land of hills and valleys."

There comes a time when the same information comes to every forward-moving life. The land of childhood and early youth has been a place of no violent extremes of experience. Gentle undulations have at the most given hint that there are such things as ups and downs. But the land, whither the vigorous young life goes in to possess it, is a land of hills and valleys ; and it were well for his peace of mind and for the making of his calculations that he should realise it in time.

We know in a general way that life will be an affair of hills and valleys. That is to say, we have a kind of general sketch-map of the territory to be occupied, although we cannot as yet fill in the details. We do not know exactly how high the hills will be, nor what

we may see from their heights. We cannot tell just how thick the valleys will stand with corn. We do not as yet foresee the snows and serenity of Hermon, or the scars and salvation of Calvary. We cannot tell whether the valleys will be exalted, or whether the hills will clap their hands. We must be ready for them to prove a vale of tears or a Hill Difficulty. Peace of mind comes only with the consciousness that whether we walk through shadowed valleys or climb delectable mountains, the only thing that really matters is that “the Lord is my Shepherd, I shall not want.”

The trouble in life begins when the temptation comes to a man to make a scheme of partition for himself. It was a Divine warning that in the land of Canaan they would find hills and valleys ; it was a devilish lie that God would be found in one part but not in another. This was the substance of the sneer of the Syrians : “The Lord is a god of the hills, but he is not a god of the valleys.”

I have called it a sneer : it was at any rate an insinuation. The men who made it at first may even have actually believed it themselves. The Syrians had just been given a tremendous beating by the men of Israel, and as the defeated party will do in such circumstances, they began to look about for an excuse of some kind to account for the unexpected reverse. “Ah, yes ! we have it,” the men about the king of Syria said to him ; “we know how the Israelites managed to beat us. Their god is a god of the hills ; therefore they were stronger than we : but let us fight against them in the plain, and surely we shall be stronger than they.” The gambler can always muster

some sort of an excuse for having another mad fling.

Well, the men of Israel were hillmen, and their agility and their knowledge of the ways about the mountains no doubt did give them a margin of advantage when it came to mountain-warfare. But you can never altogether explain the outcome of even a material contest in purely material terms. No doubt some such thought as that which occurred to the Syrians suggested itself to some of Claverhouse's dragoons, as their horses stumbled on the rough mountain-sides, while their Covenanting quarry got safely away under cover of a friendly Scotch mist. That the same kind of thought inspired at least one side in the great contest which brought the Spanish galleons to lie at the bottom of Toberinory Bay, is shown by the fact that on the Elizabethan medal which was struck to commemorate the destruction of the Armada, the words appeared : "He blew with His wind, and they were scattered." Over and over again in the story of the rise of Holland under William the Silent, there is abundant evidence to show how dangerous a people armed with a just cause and fighting on their own element could prove ; and also how impossible it is to insert the keen edge of sceptical criticism between the points where human valour stopped and Divine intervention began. One thing is certain, that there would have been no angels at Mons if there had been no *men* at Mons. But when in any contest, even a material one, you have human faith and fortitude all out, you need not be surprised if you hear of God coming in. The last word on this topic, and surely it is an eminently sane as it is a wonderfully suggestive testimony, is that spoken by Marshal Foch

in the account he gave to M. André de Marincourt of *L'Echo de Paris*, regarding the winning of the war. "Without trying to drag in miracles," said the Marshal of France, "just because clear vision is vouchsafed to a man, and because afterwards it turns out that this clear vision has determined movements fraught with enormous consequences in a formidable war, I still hold that this clear vision comes from the providential force in the hands of which one is an instrument, and that the victorious decision emanates from above by a higher and Divine will." You may depend upon it that there was very good ground for that conviction of the Syrians that the God of Israel was a Highlander.

But all the same it was a sneer or a cheap jest on the part of the Syrians, even though it may have been, as well, a soldier's superstition. And if an idea like this gets root in a man's life it may play havoc with it, and finally make him an easy prey to his enemies. To limit the power of the authority of God to certain tracts of life, believing that outside these His power or His authority ends, is to court spiritual disaster. And yet how many act as if the Lord were God of the Church, but not God of the chamber ; God of the Communion table, but not God of the dinner table. Alas that so many of us give just enough colour to the Syrian sneer to make it seem plausible ! But against the sneer of the enemy and the lurking suspicion of our own heart there is only one thing to be done—to come out and meet it in open fight as the Israelites met the Syrians, laying both them and their lie in a common grave.

How easily this idea may take root, and how debilitating it may prove, is shown in the many guises in which

the infamous suggestion presents itself to our minds. It isn't hard to believe that the Lord is a God of the hills. Given youth and vigour, and the kind of good prospect you get from a hill-top ; given "the lark on the wing, the morning at seven, the hillside dew-pearled," it's easy to sing, "God's in His heaven, all's right with the world." The optimistic charm of *Pippa Passes* may be explained on the score of her creator's robust constitution ; while some of the more biliary passages of Carlyle equally have their origin in an attack of dyspepsia that won't pass. Given a sunny villa in the north of Italy on the one hand, and a back room in Cheyne Row in a November fog on the other, and you may make a very fair estimate of the kind of book that will emanate from either. So the modern Syrian sneers, and is apt to think himself not only rather clever, but equally conclusive.

But if one psalmist can sing with abandon, "I to the hills will lift mine eyes," another can sing with no less conviction, "Yea, though I walk through death's dark vale, yet will I fear none ill." The grace of God streams from the hills, it descends to the plains of life.

The insinuation is that the Lord is God of the supreme moments of life, but He is not a God of the supine moments. That is a suggestion of the Evil One, a suggestion so devilish, so destructive if it take root in a man's mind, so utterly irreligious, that the chronicler does a very bold thing. He represents God as having been stung by that Syrian taunt, and taking up the challenge. It may have been that this subtly circulated superstition of the Syrian propaganda bureau was beginning to take effect in the army of

Israel, and threatening to undermine their morale. “A man of God came near and spake unto the king of Israel, and said, Thus saith the Lord, Because the Syrians have said, The Lord is a god of the hills, but he is not a god of the valleys ; therefore will I deliver all this great multitude into thine hand, and ye shall know that I am the Lord.” If men of God never said anything more than that, they would fulfil their function in a world of depressed human nature. If Christian preaching had no other theme than to tell us to trust the heart’s great instincts, it would be worth while to set up pulpits throughout the land.

It is easy to believe that God is a God of the hills. That may account for your victory in the first fight. Enthusiasm will accomplish almost anything ; and that is why the pagans gave it the name it has, which we use to this day, meaning “the presence of God within.” Joy, ecstasy, faith, youth—you can win almost any fight on these conditions, and be quite convinced that the Lord is a God of the hills. The great discovery of religion comes with the second and sterner conflict, when the Syrian hosts return, meaning business this time, and you realise that unless God is the God of the valleys as well, you are in for a bad time of it.

Perhaps you are in the position of the king of Israel, having won your first fight. Youth was on your side, joy was your ally, faith came readily to your support. You are prepared to believe in the God of the hills. What if joy turns to sorrow, faith gives way to doubt, youth surrenders to age ? Will the natural buoyancy of temperament carry you through then ? Will the

sun of life only catch and gild the tops of the hills, and leave the valley in deepest shade? Will the Syrian sneer about your fair-weather religion prove ghastly true? "The prophet came near to the king of Israel, and said unto him, Go, strengthen thyself, and mark, and see what thou doest: for at the return of the year the king of Syria will come up against thee." Christian preaching would be false to the facts of life, and worse than useless to us, if it did not sound this urgent note of warning. Be prepared. Strengthen thyself by spiritual exercise and constant vigilance. Mark well, and see what thou doest. It is a message this for the turn of the year.

"Because the Syrians have said . . . therefore will I deliver all this great multitude into thine hand, and ye shall know that I am the Lord." That is to say, whenever God finds a man facing the problems of life with a chastened spirit and a due sense of responsibility, as this king of Israel presumably did in response to the warning of his minister, He vouchsafes to him a deeper knowledge of Divine realities than he ever enjoyed before. He makes such a one victor in the second fight with Syria. The natural optimism of youth develops and deepens into the settled faith of advancing years. The lie is given in actual and joyful experience to the Syrian sneer. God does not desert us in sorrow. He does not leave us to ourselves when we are wrestling with the lurking doubt, the elusive misgiving. Even to hoar hairs He carries us. He keeps His word. "Ye shall know that I am the Lord." The Syrian lie is dead at last. God is, He is the God of the valleys. He who has inspired the doers of the heroic deeds that shine in the pages of history is no

less the strength of all faithful souls that are striving to do His will in the common ways of life.

" God of the heights where men walk free,
 Above life's lure, beyond death's sting ;
 Lord of all souls that rise to Thee,
 White with supreme self-offering ;
 Thou who hast crowned the hearts that dare,
 Thou who hast nerved the hands to do,
 God of the heights I give us to share
 Thy kingdom in the valleys too."

And the prayer is heard, and gloriously answered, as might be illustrated from nearly every biography. For, as Donald Hankey put it in a letter to his sister after his first immersion in the life of a N.C.O. and all the test of active service : " Quite simply, I do find that it is praying that makes the difference. The possibility of overcoming one's particular disabilities by the partial realisation of an outside Power ready to alter the balance has been real to me."

And there is one other form in which we must beware of giving lodging to this ancient Syrian heresy of the hills, and that is the form in which it is most apt to be cherished by many good people. They think of the bare, bleak hills of duty, those high, rugged peaks that are always the first to catch both the snow and the sunlight ; and they get into a way of thinking, and even of trying to make us all believe, that the Lord is only the God of those hills. To say the least, it is a very dangerous partitioning of life that makes God helpless in the valleys where men are sowing and reaping their daily bread, and women are singing. If God is only at home amid the bleak austerities of the

hills, and out of it amid the laughter of the valleys, then indeed we may look for the Syrians to sweep in triumph through the land. We can never forget that it is the hills that feed with their streams of pure water all the life of the valleys beneath ; but I always tremble when I hear good people partitioning off the sacred and the secular, and denying that the grace of God can reach to the lower levels of life. There is evil enough in this world without drawing up a list of artificial sins. It is hard enough to keep the commandments of God without piling on the traditions of men. The Saviour of the world was both divine and human, true God and no less true man. The Syrian is no fool. He is not going to tackle a man on the side on which he is strongest. “ Their god is a god of the hills ; therefore they were stronger than we : but let us fight against them in the plain, and surely we shall be stronger than they.” That is just how the enemy has so very nearly won in our land, because we have been too apt to busy ourselves manufacturing little coteries of “ unco guid,” to have a message for those who want to be good, but shun with a wholesome fear the opprobrium of being “ goody-goody.” It was bad tactics to keep on fortifying the hills and to leave the plain unprotected. For the future we must try to make the gradient between worship and work and play a little less steep. Why should we not be able to speak of Holy Commerce as truly as of Holy Communion ? The hills for God and the valleys for His enemies will never do. We all believe in the God of the heroic : what we most need is the God of the humdrum. Everybody’s eye is attracted to the star : but salvation is cradled in the stable.

“ Yet through the daily, dazing toil,
The crowding tasks of hand and brain,
Keep pure our lips, Lord Christ, from soil,
Keep pure our lives from sordid gain.
Come to the level of our days,
The lowly hours of dust and din,
And in the valley-lands upraise
Thy kingdom over self and sin.”

And so as we go forward to meet all the unknown of life, let us remember that He who goes before us is the God of all the earth, of the whole of life. Isaiah knew that it was not so difficult to “ mount up with wings as eagles.” We all have that experience from time to time. He reserved the glorious grace of God for the more trying climax—to run without wearying and to walk without growing faint. I think that there are few misgivings in life stronger than the fear that the rest of life will prove an anti-climax. One wrote from the excitement of his first fight in France : “ This is the top of the fulness of life ” ; and many who have returned to civil life have confessed their fear lest the whole of their after-life should prove, could not help proving, a ghastly anti-climax. Life could never rise to such heights again. Perhaps you have felt the same yourself after some sublime experience, or when you have turned the forties, or the fifties, or the sixties. But it is not so in reality. The Author of our lives is too sure and practised a hand to make a blunder like that. Much as you may have enjoyed the thrill and the air and the sense of conquest after scaling one of our Highland bens, even if you had been given the option, you would never have chosen to remain up there. “ It is good to be here.” Yes, but it is better to go away down

into the valley again, and work it all out in the great world of needy men. Oh, never be guilty of harbouring the Syrian suspicion. From the cradle to the grave God is our Sun and Shield. The heights of life and death's dark vale are alike His territory. To-day and to-morrow, here and hereafter, He gives the victory to His own, making them more than conquerors. Be ours the strength of common things, the inspiration of the lower levels.

“ Not ours the dawn-lit heights ; and yet
Up to the hills where men walk free
We lift our eyes, lest faith forget
The Light which lighted them to Thee.
God of all heroes, ours and Thine !
God of all toilers ! Keep us true,
Till Love's eternal glory shine
In sunrise on the valleys too.”

XXIV

CASTLES IN SPAIN

“ Whensoever I take my journey into Spain, I will come to you: . . . but now I go unto Jerusalem to minister.”

AND so St. Paul had his “ castle in Spain ” like the rest of us !

Well, we do not need to hold the title-deeds to spend many a happy hour in the stately pleasure-domes of our own decreeing. We are not hampered in their erection by restriction of material nor by shortage of labour. Even in the matter of more substantial properties, they are not always possessed by the man who pays the taxes on them. “ All that land is mine ! ” said the purse-proud owner of a newly-acquired estate to his artist-friend. “ Yes, ” was the knowing reply ; “ but the landscape’s mine ! ” I do not wonder that the wiseacres get hopelessly confused over the determination of land-values, for the subtlest and best of these values can never be caught in the surveyor’s chains. The world is readjusting its whole table of values these days ; and a new land-hunger is betraying itself in many ways, —a hunger for the land of far-stretching distances, a desire for citizenship in that city which was built to music, and so never built, and yet for ever built.

It was a real spiritual refreshment to the apostle to retreat at times to his "castle in Spain." He seems to have kept himself going by frequent journeys in the spirit to his country-house — his "Better Country" house. "I will go up to the land of unwalled villages ; I will go to them that are at rest, that dwell safely, all of them dwelling without walls, and having neither bars nor gates." How these walls and bars and gates get on our nerves at times ! How stifled, sunless, airless, shut-in they make us feel ! "Consider the lilies"—at sixpence a bloom ! Well, all the more need for a country-house and a castle in Spain, the means of providing fresh air for the spirit and letting the soul travel.

" When, like committed linnets, I
With shriller throat shall sing
The sweetness, mercy, majesty,
And glories of my King ;
When I shall voice aloud how good
He is, how great should be,
Enlarged winds, that curl the flood,
Know no such liberty.

If I have freedom in my love
And in my soul am free,
Angels alone, that soar above,
Enjoy such liberty."

One thought of the King, of the love of God in Christ Jesus, of the glorious company of the redeemed whose names are written in heaven, and many of whom awaited him there,—and the walls and the gates and the bars fell asunder for the apostle, and his prison of the flesh and time and circumstance was shaken to its foundations.

And it does not take from, but rather adds to the source of St. Paul's inspiration that these visions and times of refreshing seem often to have come to him as he thought of his friends and of their love for him and his love for them. Paul's ladders reached unto heaven, but they were always set up on earth. No soldier on active service has ever longed more for his overdue "leave" than the apostle longed for the day when he could go and visit his friends in Rome. You can see how he loved them by the kind of messages he sent them, so varied and intimate and particular and affectionate. But there is an ache of vagueness about all his plans and his whole future. "I trust to see you." "I hope I shall." "Whosoever,"—but it must be a very indefinite "whosoever." If you read the verses carefully you will notice that there is an entire break in the construction, so that the exact words are difficult to render. Paul seems to have started dreaming about that castle in Spain until his thought became cloudy and his sentences tangled and involved; and he just suddenly breaks off with a "But I must get to business again." People sometimes say they cannot follow the intricate theological arguments of the Epistle to the Romans; but here is the most human touch in the world; the page is moist with warm tears. It might be rendered thus: "From Jerusalem right round to Illyricum I have been able to complete the preaching of the gospel of Christ—my ambition always being to preach it only in places where there had been no mention of Christ's name, that I might not build on foundations laid by others, but that (as it is written) they should see who never had learned about Him, and

they who had never heard of Him should understand. This is why I have been so often hindered from coming to you. But now, as I have no further scope for work in these parts, perhaps now my dream will come true—the longing of these many years to come to you—whensoever I make my ourney into Spain—I will come to you—I hope to see you—You'll come to the ship and see me off, won't you?—but not before we've had some good times together. Rome! Spain! Phoebe and Mary and Julia! Epænetus my beloved, Urbane, Nereus and his sister! I wonder if she'll remember me? What talks we'll have far into the night! What memories to recall! Rome! Spain! I wonder! I wonder! Ah!—but at the moment I'm off to Jerusalem on an errand to the saints." And so Paul started from his reverie: "To minister unto the saints." Brave soul, to put it that way! Do you know what ministering to the saints meant? It meant going off to a place he had no special desire ever to see again, to try and help people who didn't particularly want to be helped, and would probably misunderstand and criticise and resent all he tried to do for them. "Ministering to the saints"—a truly Pauline euphemism for preaching to empty pews, and sitting on dreary committees, and beating up for Church funds, and doing all those things that seemed to make his cherished dream fade into even dimmer and remoter distance—Spain and Rome, and the handshake of Rufus, "that choice Christian," and the sweet face of Julia.

We are all the owners or part owners of some castle in Spain. No matter what we have seen and done and experienced, there are still some dreams which we

carry in our heart. You would have thought that Paul's insatiable *wanderlust* would have been satisfied. Ephesus in proconsular Asia, Athens and Corinth across the Ægean, had witnessed his abundant labours. He traversed the map from Syria to Macedonia. "From Jerusalem round about unto Illyricum I have fully preached the gospel of Christ." But Rome and Spain were the dream of his life. And the years of splendid patience and heroic toil rolled on, and the man's hair turned grey, and it seemed as if the call of the West would never, never find fulfilment. It was no passing whim, but the settled longing of his whole being, as we see from the way in which the apostle comes back to the project again and again. "When therefore I have accomplished this, and have sealed to them this fruit, I will come by you into Spain. And I know that, when I come unto you, I shall come in the fulness of the blessing of Christ."

Every life has its secret hope, its hidden desire. Our work compels us, so to speak, to plod away back to Jerusalem and those wearisome saints and cynical sinners. Listen to that godly soul, Frederick William Faber, when he lets himself go :

"For goodness all ignoble seems,
Ungenerous and small,
And the holy are so wearisome,
Their very virtues pall."

That is an outburst as refreshing as it is unexpected ; and it is desperately true. A very able and devoted missionary in India has said that no one who has not worked in the temper-trying heat of the hot-weather season in India can fully appreciate that injunction

“ Let not the sun go down upon your wrath,” and that there are times when just about the last thing in the world that you want is “ the converse of the saints.” And if that be so even in the work of the Kingdom, in the instruction of the young, and in the various duties that we undertake out of love to God and man, how much more must it be the case in the work of the house and the office and the shop and the yard where nerves soon discover their “ edge ” ? We must go away back to the demands of to-morrow with their insistent clamour, however much we long to be doing other things. But what would we do without our dream ? Life is never fully expressed for any of us in the routine of our daily work. The sense of freedom and horizon awakened in our minds by this confession of St. Paul appeals powerfully to us because it is answered by a vague ache and longing in our own unsatisfied hearts and unfulfilled dreams. The human interest and the suppressed passion grip us so powerfully because we too could not live without our Spanish gold. Life and desire are larger than anything that has yet been offered us to satisfy them. It has room for the unrealised. And if we should yield to the sense of sympathy and friendship which the peace and respite of this quiet talk together begets, and should be very frank with ourselves and each other, we should confess that one of the inspirations and comforts of life for us, especially when most we feel the limitation, irksomeness, and humdrum character of it, is the whisper and promise to our own heart, “ I shall take my journey into Spain.”

Do you remember One who “ set his face steadfastly

to go to Jerusalem"? It was the last place on earth that His steps would naturally have sought. Well He knew what awaited Him there. And do you not think that as He went He carried His dream in His heart? Hopes and expectations that He had cherished; memories, bright memories of Galilee, and of a realm still fairer which He had left that He might do the will of God. Or listen to His servant Paul: "Behold, I go bound in the spirit unto Jerusalem, not knowing the things which shall befall me there: save that the Holy Ghost testifieth unto me in every city, saying that bonds and afflictions wait for me." It wasn't a very cheery outlook. Well the apostle knew the wages of the service he had undertaken. Well they knew what duty and service meant, and might mean, who left us wearing that mask of gaiety. It was a long, long way to Spain, or whatever other name they filled in to express the place where their thoughts and their hearts kept ever turning. But one and all never for a moment felt that the duty mocked the dream. They felt instinctively that by faithfulness to the one they were bringing the other nearer.

The thought of Spain never made St. Paul indifferent to the claims of Ephesus or Lystra or many another place where he stayed and toiled. The man who has the sublimest castle in Spain will be most interested in his duty to a tenement in the slums. "The best possibilities of our lives are perhaps bound up in our dreams, but they are set free in our deeds." St. Paul never got to Spain after all. Rome he entered, but as a prisoner in chains, and to die there. But does any one ever pity him? Why, pity is about the last thing you

think of in connection with that tremendous soul. "I will come to you," he said; and he has come in glory and permanence and triumph beyond even *his* most ambitious dreams. "I am sure," he wrote to his friends, "that when I do come unto you, I shall come in the fulness of the blessing of Christ." Would he have had that assurance if he had set sail for Spain when he knew that his path pointed to Jerusalem? Suppose he had tried to force God's hand in his life. We dare not think how miserable and tragic the result would have been.

There are a great many disappointed and embittered people in the world—people who are looking back with nothing but regret and forward with anything but hope. And why? Because they hacked their way through to Spain in opposition to the will of God and in deafness to the call of Jerusalem—hacked their way through only to find that their El Dorado was a mirage. They have seen of the travail of their soul, and it is a hideous abortion.

And there are others padding along the highway to Jerusalem, taking the wind and the rain and the sun as they come. Some fine day they promise themselves to go far afield and see their friends and visit the Land of Heart's Desire. But not to-day. And in their hearts there is the most exquisite peace. For nothing can ever rob them of their dream. No bitter disillusionment can ever convince them that, after all, there never was a castle in Spain, or that it was but a sorry affair of lath and plaster. Both dream and duty are theirs.

"Whosoever I take my journey into Spain, I will come to you. And if God so wills a longer journey

still, well, eye hath not seen nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man—the great dreaming, scheming, imagining heart of man—the things which God hath prepared for them that love him.”

XXV

ABNER'S PEACE OFFENSIVE

" Shall the sword devour for ever ? knowest thou not that it will be bitterness in the latter end ? "

THE " peace offensive " is a very old trick, as Abner's story reminds us. Indeed there are few devices, some of them sometimes labelled " modern inventions," which are not found in germ or in full growth in the old Book, of whose wisdom some of us continue to remain in such amazing ignorance. Thus the discoverer of chloroform was able to meet pietistic conscientious objectors to the deadening of pain, which, they held, was sent as a form of Divine punishment, on their own ground, by referring them to the fact that the account of the first surgical operation on record tells us that the merciful Surgeon " caused a deep sleep to fall upon Adam," before He proceeded to remove the fateful rib, " and closed up the flesh instead thereof." And to-day, when argument has arisen as to who should be credited with the invention of the life-saving device of the smoke-screen which has been employed so successfully at sea and in land operations, no claimant can get behind the fact that one of the greatest leaders of antiquity found such a protecting pall invaluable in conducting his famous exodus from Egypt. It does not take from, but rather increases the interest of the use of the device on that

memorable occasion, that Moses, with an instinct of genuine piety, did not fail to see the hand of God in it, God the All-Merciful, whose spirit works in the mind and heart of every man who seeks to help his fellow-men, to alleviate their sufferings, or to protect their lives.

And so we are not surprised to be told that Abner tried to launch a peace offensive when he found his war was not going exactly as he had hoped and expected. The events which led up to this move, the circumstances in which it was promulgated, and the manner and method of the man behind it, convince us that if history repeats itself, it is because the unregenerate human heart is ever the same. There is little change in the tactics of highly-placed criminals to-day from those of the time of King David.

Abner had thought that war would be a fine game, so long as he did not actually need to run any risk in his own skin. Utterly unprovoked, without a shred of excuse, he had plunged the country into hostilities. Across the pool of Gibeon, which served as the No-man's-land between the forces of Abner and Joab, Abner flung his challenge. "Let the young men arise and play before us." Play! He meant that they should *fight*; but such was the light jesting way in which he thought and spoke of the slaughter of picked young men on both sides, engaging in a senseless conflict in which they were all about to fall,—a wanton sacrifice to the caprice of a proud and ambitious man. Bloodshed had no horror for Abner; it would be good sport, he thought; and, in any case, he would stand a good chance of improving his position thereby.

But he soon found that things did not develop

according to plan. "There was a very sore battle that day," the ancient chronicler tells us; "and Abner was beaten before the servants of David." Then it was that Abner endeavoured to gain a breathing-space by suggesting an armistice to the opposing general. Lest you should think that one tends to read this incident too much in the light of modern happenings, let me quote Matthew Henry's comment on the passage. "He that was most forward to fight was the first that had enough of it. He that made a jest of bloodshed is now shocked at it, when he finds himself on the losing side, and the sword he made so light of drawing threatening to touch himself." He has changed his tune. Warfare is no longer playing with the sword. "Shall the sword devour for ever?" exclaimed Abner in tragic tones, now that it has begun to bite him. He has suddenly wakened to a realisation of the horror and consequent miseries of war. "Knowest thou not that it shall be bitterness in the latter end? How long shall it be then, ere thou bid the people return from following their brethren?" The thought of all this carnage makes his heart bleed. Will Joab not call off his men and let this most unfortunate conflict end?

We seem to recognise the tones. When wolves begin to bleat like sheep they make the same kind of noise, whether in Europe in the twentieth century or in Asia over 1000 B.C. As shrewd old Matthew Henry observes, if Abner had been the conqueror we should not have had him complaining of the voraciousness of the sword and the miseries of war. And Joab brings his guilt home to him in the spirited reply: "As God liveth, unless thou hadst spoken, surely then in the morning the people had gone away, nor followed every

one his brother." Who was it began the war? "Unless thou hadst spoken"—unless *you* had given orders to mobilise, bidding the young men arise and play, none of us would have drawn a sword. It's all very well for you to complain in high-tragedy tones that the sword devours, but who first unsheathed it? It was easy to make war, but not so easy to make peace.

Is it not startling sometimes, how the mirror of God's Word flashes a blinding light, or lets us see ourselves with every wrinkle and blemish? It is so easy to repent of others' sin! It takes very little wisdom to be wise after the event. "If thou hadst not spoken." If we had not lent our countenance to a scheme which we knew, to say the least of it, was shady. Or if we *had* spoken. If we had slain the infamous lie or the base insinuation in its cradle before it had acquired the size and strength that it now has. It doesn't do for Abner to get up on the top of a hill and surround himself with a band of men, thinking to hide himself in the crowd, and then utter pretty platitudes about the terrible state of things in which society finds itself. "The sins that we do by two and two we must pay for one by one." The civic and national conscience is made up of the moral sense of all the individuals, and especially of those who maintain the standard of religion. We have each to bear a share of the responsibility for the national and international misunderstandings which we so rightly deplore. "As God liveth, if thou hadst not spoken." That Jingo sentiment to which we gave ill-timed expression; that claptrap sneer to which we gave voice on the political platform because

we knew it would please our party and raise a cheap applause ; that taunt with the sting in it, in which we sweepingly condemned a whole class, although in uttering it we were well aware it was more clever than just or true, and which still rankles in the bosom of fellow-countrymen ; that disparagement of the aims and efforts of others ; that echoing of the unthinking cry of the mob ; “as God liveth, if thou hadst not spoken, surely the people had not fallen foul of their brethren.”

Abner thought that he could have peace without penitence, and there too he was at fault. He was anxious that Joab should call off the dogs of war when he found that they were biting the wrong party. He would have been glad to have the *status quo ante bellum* restored as quickly and quietly as possible. He wanted, in short, a cheap and easy peace ; and he had to learn that it couldn't be had.

Like Abner, each of us must have our individual conscience roused if peace within and without our borders is to be established on a lasting basis. We cannot shelter behind public opinion and common custom. We have each our measure of guilt for the appalling circumstances in which we are involved to-day. We would to God that we were all out of this mess. We wish we could clean the slate of international politics and internal social conditions, and begin afresh. The calamity with which Abner saw himself and his people faced made him absolutely unreasonable. He tried to make Joab the scapegoat. “How long shall it be ere thou bid the people return from fighting their brethren ?” And all the time Abner was wilfully blinding himself to the so quickly

and conveniently forgotten fact that the boot was on the other foot. "As God liveth, unless *thou* hadst spoken, this would never have come to pass."

And so we have got to be sorry not only for the present state of things, but sorry that they ever came to be. The issue of things must alter not only men's minds—for most of us have been revising the crude judgments of our untroubled and unthinking years—but must alter their hearts as well. Let us ask ourselves, Why do we want abiding peace? On what grounds do we have the effrontery to pray for it? Is it merely to let us go back to the old selfish ways and the old level of life? Do we really think that God would use Divine omnipotence to shorten war by one hour for that? On what grounds do we earnestly desire internal harmony and industrial content? Is it simply in order that we may not be faced with the inconvenience of a strike, or is it that we are genuinely anxious not merely to live and let live, but to make it possible for all to live decently and soberly and comfortably and as Christians should live? We wonder if Abner really had the face (as the schoolboys say) to insinuate that Joab was responsible for the continuance of the terrible state of things. To a certain extent he was, indeed; and who could blame him? But did Abner really delude himself and his followers into believing that *they* were the injured ones? Self-deception is such a subtle thing, as we know from our experience, that anything is possible. "What price Christianity?" a certain business man said to me not long ago à propos of the war, in circumstances such that I was unable to answer his question without seeming rudeness and

too sharp point. "What price Christianity?" he said, shrugging his shoulders, and would not wait for an answer. The price was fixed once and for all, and it has never altered—*the price of a cross*. You can't redeem and regenerate society for less. You can't secure peace for the world on any lower terms. And which of us can pretend that we have really begun to pay the price? Has our devotion to Christ and His Church ever really cost us anything? Have we paid any kind of price for the sake of the Kingdom of God? Has our dream of a league of nations, or a harmonious and prosperous and contented mother-land, entailed the giving up of one hour of our time, of anything that really mattered of our means? Has it cost us the surrender of one pet prejudice or one selfish desire? And yet we would add this to all our past history of criminal indifference and selfishness—*we would try to cast the blame on our Joab*.

"What price Christianity?" The old price, the price of a cross. And as we set about rebuilding the fabric of civilisation we must reverse, most of us, the order of things upon which we have been proceeding up to the time of this present cataclysm. We must plant the cross, not on the top of our churches and public edifices, but let it rather be the very heart and centre of the foundation. There appeared lately a very suggestive article on the training of the young airman. His one ambition is to have "wings" and to soar. But before that can be safely done, there is a necessary period of drill and discipline and much irksome exercise. What we need to introduce voluntarily into our lives if we would reach any of the heights on which our heart is set, is some moral equi-

valent of that drill and discipline which made our army so effective and strong to endure. But look at us. We make next to no conscience of religious exercises, either public or private. Sleepiness suffices to make our evening devotions very perfunctory, and a shower of rain shuts off our public worship of God for another week. Even supposing we thought we were deriving little profit or pleasure from the religious exercise of our soul, it would help to put iron into our blood just to make these things more a matter of conscience and an occasion for the disciplining of the over-pampered body. Which is to rule, flesh or spirit ? We seem to be agreed that the old religious regime of our fathers is altogether too Spartan for the present day—the old-fashioned Sunday, the long sermons, the Shorter Catechism and the rest. It was a desperately severe training, but look at the kind of men it produced ! Look at the souls they grew in those days ! Are we to be slaves of the pipe and the easy-chair and creature-comforts, or servants of God ? " Give us this day our daily bread," our Lord taught us we might be bold to pray to God ; but not before we had said " Hallowed be thy name," and asked that His kingdom might come. And so the daily bread gets a little dearer, and meat is cut off, and coal grows scarce, and " God is not mocked," and will not listen to the fourth and fifth petitions until we have begun to show some anxiety about the first and the second and the third.

" Shall the sword devour for ever ? " We ask that question, and we keep asking it, and speculating when it will cease devouring. It is so easy to turn poetical and sentimental and to use fine words and echo pious

wishes, but some men have no right to use fine phrases. "Then"—when he was in the hole that he had digged for others—"Abner called to Joab, and said, Shall the sword devour for ever?" "Baa-baa, black sheep!" But the question is, "Have you any wool?" Have you brought forth any fruits of repentance? What right had Abner to talk in that "high falutin'" style? Why did William Hohenzollern's invocations of God outrage every decent man more than any of his stinking bombs? Why do some men's prayers and public appearances offend every instinct of decency we possess? "Shall the sword devour for ever? Knowest thou not that it will be bitterness in the latter end?" But Abner should have thought of that just twelve hours earlier. He should have made some of those pretty speeches to himself and his followers when his heart was lifted up within him. "How easy it is for men to use reason when it makes for them, who would not use it if it made against them." How the issue of things alters men's minds! If Abner of the evening could only have had a talk with the Abner of the same morning! If only poor Nicholas Romanoff could have had five minutes with the last Czar of all the Russias!

"If thou hadst not spoken." We feel the edge of Joab's pointed retort. And now Abner's preaching is as distasteful as his prating was. He must not think to escape the result of his criminal conduct under cover of a smoke-screen of fine phrases and sentimental generalities.

"Thou to wax fierce
In the cause of the Lord!
To threat and to pierce
With the heavenly sword!"

Thou warnest and smitest ;
Yet Christ must atone
For a soul that thou slightest—
Thine own."

If we are to avoid the bitterness in the latter end, if we are to prevent the people following their brethren in order to destroy them, we must pray for the peace of Jerusalem, and resolve in the sight of God that we will be governed by no selfish ambition or unjust motive, but in all things make it our endeavour to love the Lord our God with all our heart, with all our soul, with all our strength, and with all our mind ; and our neighbour as ourselves.

XXVI

“CONFESSIONS OF AN ADVENTUROUS SOUL”

THAT is a happy title which a recent writer has given to the Book of Ecclesiastes, a book which has much in common with the prevailing fashion in Society of wearing one's heart on a publisher's sleeve.

We reach the end of this amazingly frank and out-spoken book, and we feel as if we were parting from a friend,—one whom we know almost as intimately as that other diarist, Samuel Pepys, another strange blend of worldly wisdom and unrelenting piety. They are both excellent company, and they lay bare their inmost thoughts in the most engaging fashion. And it does not detract from what they have to say, that they were both courtiers, men of wit and wisdom, cultured, versed in all the ways of men and affairs, determined to see life and enjoy it, and determined also to see God and truth in their own way and through nobody else's spectacles. Ecclesiastes takes us to some strange places and sometimes into queer surroundings and society, but the result is that he is surely the least dull of all the company of those who have ever assumed the name or style of Preacher. His final verdict upon life may be summed up in the confession of Pepys about a certain play that he once went to see,

a confession that may well stand also for his view of the larger stage of life where all are players : " It is an excellent play ; the more I see it, the more I love the wit of it ; only the business of abusing the Puritans begins to grow stale and of no use, they being the people that at last will be found the wisest."

It is always interesting to see where and how things end. Life is too big and breezy a business, there are too many side winds and cross-currents for us to imagine that a man will hold an altogether undeflected course spiritually, however successfully and repeatedly it may be done morally. But one thing is absolutely certain, that according to the tend so will be the end. The old ship in which the apostle sailed may be broken up, owing to the violence of the elements, and to the fact that in these days we have fallen into a place where not two seas meet (the flesh and the spirit warring against one another), but all the conflicting tides of thought and feeling, vexed by a thousand waxing and waning moons. At least in the experience of every one of us there comes a time when we fall into the place where the two seas meet, the new and old. And none can foretell what a breaking up of things there will be ; but even so, for those who are in earnest about reaching land there will be escape, on planks and broken pieces of the old ship, some clinging to one spar, some to another.

" With faces darkened in the battle flame,
Through wind, and sun, and showers of bleaching rain,
With many a wound upon us, many a stain,
We came with steps that faltered—yet we came."

That is the great, the essential thing, that in the mercy

of God we should make a not altogether dishonourable end.

So is it with Ecclesiastes. He has come through the fight, and is about to say his last word to us. He has lived in difficult times, first when an unscrupulous and suspicious tyrant sat upon the throne, and then in times of lawless mob-rule. In addition to all that, he has had an unceasing warfare with temperament and depression. But his wild whirling words have to be judged in the light of his final conclusions, when the burden and heat of the day are over, and there comes “the setting sun, and music at the close.” Once again, and for the last time, near the close of this chapter, you catch the old *sigh-motif*, “Vanity of vanities ; all is vanity.” But it is not as if he had simply come back to the place from which he started. He seems only to be at Mons once again, *but this time he is not retreating*. He has completed a circle, but on a higher turn of the spiral, and Sedan is not Sedan.

We often seem to ourselves, and to others who are watching us, to have come back after all our fighting and endurance to the place where we were when first we engaged the enemy. We seem to the casual onlooker to be poorer, older, with terribly diminished forces. But this time we come as victors, not to parley with the foe, but to dictate the terms of our own free and unconquerable spirit. “The same man who uttered this weary refrain at the beginning of his quest in a mood of despondent scepticism now repeats it from the higher standpoint of faith. All human effort to explain the destinies of men, apart from God, are in vain.”

This was the great message which Ecclesiastes had for his fellow-men. And he tells us, what all other preachers would do well to lay to heart, that he made it his endeavour to clothe his message in a form that was at once true and attractive. "The Preacher sought to find out words of delight, and that which was written uprightly, even words of truth." We could love Ecclesiastes for that endeavour, even if he had said and done nothing else. He knew how good preaching is for the souls of all of us, and yet how we all hate it ; and he was aware of the necessity for making his preaching attractive. This was the way of the Divine Architect. In His sanctuary are found beauty *and* strength. It was the way of the Master. People flocked to hear Him because He did not speak the way they commonly spoke in the synagogue ; and the folk all marvelled at the charming words that proceeded out of His mouth. So St. Luke tells us, who was an artist as well as a physician, and was naturally always on the outlook for beauty everywhere. The Divine Preacher preaches the resurrection. But not out of dusty tomes, and with many a heavy argument of firstly, secondly, and thirdly. He just sends His army of green spears up through the bare ground every returning spring ; puts a new song in the throats of the birds and a fresh gladness in the hearts of men ; and says in His own quiet and all-confident way, "If it were not so, I would have told you." He does not declaim about the love and goodness of the Father in His preaching. He just splashes up a fresh resplendent sunrise every day in the joy of His heart, clothes the grass of the field in kingly raiment of purple and gold, fills the

nests with little ones, and the woods with music ; and leaves every wise worshipper to draw the glorious moral for himself of “ How much more.”

That was the kind of way Ecclesiastes longed to be able to preach, as he sat down in his study to try and discover truth which would cheer the hearts of those who were perplexed, presenting it in an attractive and winsome and memorable form, without any sacrifice of truth. And has he not succeeded, as every true preacher is bound in measure to succeed, if he loves truth and beauty and pursues them earnestly ? As men have listened to his unconventional talk, until they almost forgot they were listening to a preacher, they have found he was telling them their own story no less than his, that he was trying to lead them away from the vanities which they themselves felt to be vanities, toward an abiding Good in which he had found rest for his soul. As they heard him enforce the duties of charity, industry, hilarity ; above all, as he unfolded before them the bright hope of a future judgment in which all wrongs would be redressed and all acts of duty receive a just recompense of reward, they must have felt that they had got alongside one called Help, a true brother and a good comrade by the way. This is preaching adapted to the practical needs of men busied in the common affairs of life, and with no learning and no leisure for the study of intricate problems of theology. And perhaps we will never have preaching like it again until our preachers cease wearing clerical collars and still stiffer manners and forms of thought, and, as in the old days, prophets and preachers come straight down into the beaten ways of men. We

need preachers who will do for the Gospel of Jesus Christ what Addison claimed to have done for philosophy in his day,—bring it from the schools and pedants down to the coffee-houses and haunts of human geniality; men like the great Hebrew preachers, who, whether, like Ecclesiastes, they had all the charm and culture of the highest circles of society, or were, as many of the greatest and most influential were, fishermen, carpenters, tent-makers, sandal-makers, shepherds, husbandmen, “grew studious of the Divine Will and learned the secrets of righteousness and peace.”

The conviction which perhaps ultimately and completely restored the soul of Ecclesiastes is a very familiar one, although it is a pleasant surprise to meet it in a new and unexpected setting. It was the thought of God as the “Shepherd of souls that wander from the way,” that great thought which we owe to the Hebrew insight, and which was perfected and exemplified in Him whom we call pre-eminently the Good Shepherd. “The words of the wise,” says Ecclesiastes, “every wise and helpful word, is like a goad or a nail driven well home; but they are all the gift of one Shepherd.” That is the kind of conviction in which a man can rest at the last as if he had found the green pastures and the waters of comfort. I suppose Ecclesiastes, like the rest of us, had learned the 23rd Psalm as a little lad; and after all the vicissitudes of his eventful life, when he had forgotten many another thing, it all came back to him and restored his soul. I’m not surprised, for it is exactly my own experience, the thing I am finding continually, that a man may travel far, and visit

many places where he had no right to go ; but if he is to have a chance of hearing, far, far away, like bells at evening pealing, some music of the Gospel that will lead him home, ninety-nine times out of a hundred it will be “The Lord’s my Shepherd,” or “This night I lay me,” or something that he learned as a very little lad. So it was with this man. Strange though life is, he knows that it is not left to itself. The sheep are not without care. Both the discipline and the rest, the goad of onward progress and the nail of secure tether, the valley of shadow and the green pastures, are “given by one shepherd.” We hear a faint far-away echo in the heart of Ecclesiastes of the simple faith of Israel, something he had learned once at his mother’s knee or in Sabbath school. “The Lord is my Shepherd, I shall not want.”

And notice what a big, broad conception of God’s dealings with a man this Shepherd conviction gave Ecclesiastes. The shepherd uses his goad to drive the flock to fresh pastures. He also uses the nail, or tent-peg, driven well home into the ground, to secure the tent at evening. ‘The goad is for stimulus, the tent-peg for rest.’ God uses the discipline, and the things in life that make us think, for the same purpose. There must be both progressive and conservative elements in every well-shepherded human life. But, says Ecclesiastes, both the conservative shepherd pitching his tent on familiar fields of thought, and the progressive herdsman goading men on to new pastures, are instruments in the hand of God. Life becomes a comprehensible unity when we see that both dark and bright, both goad and nail, are gifts from the hand of one Shepherd.

Life is a broken, disjointed, cruel experience, until we can make a swift and easy transition from the green pastures and the waters of rest to the valley of the shadow—all under the leadership of the one Shepherd. Are there any haunted rooms in your house of life? any chambers that you tiptoe quickly by? “When I first entered Ranelagh,” Samuel Johnson said to Boswell of that gay centre of London’s amusement, “it gave an expansion and gay sensation to my mind, such as I never experienced anywhere else, but . . . it went to my heart to consider that there was not one in all that brilliant circle that was not afraid to go home and think.” When life finds its Shepherd you will not be afraid to go home and think everything out to its last logical conclusion and most tragic possibility. So far from fettering thought by yielding yourself to Christ, you give it a new freedom. “They shall go in and out, and find pasture.” In, “far ben,” experiencing all the warmth and sweetness of the Shepherd’s love and protection; and out, to the farthest reaches of the inquiring mind and inquisitive spirit: and all the time—and herein is the grace of the Shepherd—finding pasture.

And so, like every honest man, after all his wanderings Ecclesiastes finds his way home at last, resting in the conviction that there is a moral Governor of the world, that the Judge of all the earth will certainly do right. “For God shall bring every work into judgment, with every secret thing, whether it be good or whether it be evil.” If not now, then some day all the secret treaties which we make with sin in any shape or form, every shade of compromise with the foes of righteousness, will be shouted from the housetops.

Are we not in a wonderful position to endorse his words to-day, and to take his faith as our guide ? “ For four years we talked of the moral law and trusted in it with more or less of faith. We spoke of it to each other, so that we might still believe in it, while again and again it did not seem to work. We fought against an enemy who seemed to understand the nature of the universe better than we did ; who said that all force was material and had harnessed the material force of things to his own mechanism. There were times, even, when to our faithlessness the whole struggle became squalid and meaningless, a struggle of animals with dreams against animals that had learnt not to dream.” We remember how time and again, too, fortune seemed to favour the enemy, and we were disappointed as if by some malignity more powerful than theirs. “ And then, suddenly, the working of the moral law was revealed in actual fact. There came a moment —we can put our finger on the very day—when the enemy’s strength seemed to wither. . . . What had never happened before in the history of the war happened now. Not army after army, but nation after nation, surrendered ; until at last the nation most powerful in arms of any that the world had ever seen surrendered too, utterly spent because it had trained itself to exert all its power. And now we see that the moral law has worked the more completely because it has been so long in working. It is they who have punished themselves ; their very cunning, the cunning of man at the service of the beast of prey, is proved to be a folly unparalleled.”

With an intensity of emotion and conviction that Ecclesiastes could never know, we say to-day, “ This

is the end of the matter : Fear God, and keep His commandments ; for this is the whole duty of man." The time may seem long, but the thing is sure.

There is a passage in Tolstoy's great story *Resurrection* which seems to sum up the whole lesson of the book for us. " The work which is carried out by our life, the whole work, the whole meaning of this work is dark to me, and cannot be made intelligible. . . . Why should my friend die, and I be left alive ? . . . Why was Katyusha born ? . . . Why did this war come about ? Of what use was my subsequent dissolute life ? To understand all this, to understand the whole work of the Master, is not in my power ; but to do His will, written in my conscience, that is in my power, and that I know without a doubt. And when I do this, then undoubtedly I am at peace."

Surely, in spite of all the noisy assertion to the contrary which we hear to-day, if he can only contrive to get home with his message as this man did, the Preacher of the Word will still be king in Jerusalem.



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